JOHNNY PRYDE

By

J. J. BELL



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By J. J. BELL

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"As Clark says, it's everybody's duty to keep fit the noo. What would happen to the business if I was removed to the hospital severely injured?"

(See Page 43)

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BY

J. J. BELL

AUTHOR OF

"Cupid in Oilskins," "Wee MacGreegor Enlists," "Oh Christina," etc.



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I

He Introduces Himself

DID ever ye dream it was the Sabbath, and waken up to find it was really Wednesday mornin', 10 minutes to the time ye was dew at the shop?

I done that the other mornin'. Ye would maybe think I had a guid enough excuse, dreamin' aboot a respectible thing like the Sabbath; but ma aunt had slep' in likewise, and it must ha'e been a bad dream wi' her, for she was as cross as 2 sticks, and said I had took advantage o' her semolina, or whatever she calls the disease that she declares keeps her frae sleepin' till aboot 3 a.m. in the mornin' though she commences her

snoarin' a long time afore that. She likes things wi' grand names. I suppose that comes o' mixin' wi' the gentry folk she washes for.

Her and me bides together. I am an orphin, and she is a single spinster. Her name is Miss M. McBean, and mines is J. Pryde. I preffer mines. When she is in a guid humour she calls me Johnny; when she is not, it is John. It is mostly John. My age is 16 next July; dear knows what hers is—about 50, perhaps. She keeps a wee landry, and I assist P. Clark, the grocer. I ha'e been at the job noo for 6 month. It is pretty rotten, but this is war-time. As soon as I can save a bit I am gaun abroad, wi' a revolver, to seek ma fortune. When I get ma wages at the end o' the week I'll possess 9/-, all but 8/- pinched as usual by ma aunt; but the bob'll be a start. I am a strick tee-

totaler, and intend for to gi'e up smokin' afore long.

I first seen the light in Glasgow, though I canna mind whether it was gas or electric (*joke*), and I was gey juvenile —about a ½—when I was brought to Kirkside. The Kirkside folk calls it a toon, I suppose because it's got a Pictur' Hoose. It's a potty wee place, but said to be healthy for folk that agrees wi' damp.

I ha'e 0 to say against ma aunt, excep' that she has a bad temper, and doesna ken what fun is. She used to lether me a lot, but noo I'm ower big for that. I could knock her doon wi' 1 blow, but only a coward would strike a woman smaller nor hissel'. She brought me up. There was money left for her to do it wi', so she hasna much to grummle aboot.

But ye cannot please her! Fancy her

blamin' me for sleepin' in, that cauld, frosty mornin', when she should ha'e been up and had ma breakfast ready! Oh, but I wouldna ha'e said a single word aboot that if she hadna started yatterin' aboot ma laziness, tellin' me I ought to think shame o' masel' for no' ha'ein the fire lit. I had tried to kindle it, but couldna find neither parafine nor terpentine. Weel, I tell't her pretty sharp-like it wasna a man's place to rise and kindle the fire, as she would ha'e kent better if she hadna been an auld maid. That got her monkey up.

"Ye young rascal," she says, near fombing at the mooth, "hoo dare ye gi'e up sich impiddence? I dinna believe ye was dreamin' aboot the Sabbath! I believe ye was lyin' awake a' the time, hopin' I would sleep in! But I'll tell ye something!" says she. "If ye canna rise in the mornin', ye'll never rise in the

world, and ha'e a shop o' your own, like Mr. Clark."

"Hooch!" says I. "I wouldna tak' his shop in a gift! I would sooner be a corp nor a grocer! Did ever ye hear o' a grocer ha'ein' adventures—excep', maybe, wi' a moose at the cheese or a black beetle in the treacle?"

"You and your adventures!" she cries. "That's what comes o' gaun to the pictur' hoose and readin' trash aboot bad folk."

"If ye was readin' less, yersel', oot o' yon penny novels, ye would sleep better and be fit for your work in the mornin'," says I. I am a great reader masel', when I ha'e naething better on, but preserve me frae the saps she reads—a' aboot love and so 4th!

Hooever, I thought it was time I was tryin' to put her into a better temper, so I lets oot a hearty laugh and says, says

I: "I suppose last night ye was dreamin' ye was bein' chased by a noble duke, and ye didna want to waken up afore he catched ye!"

But it was nae use; in fac' it seemed to annoy her. So I jist let yer yatter till I had got ootside ma breakfast, and then I made a B-line for the shop. It wasna the 1st time I had been late, and I kent P. Clark wouldna be extra pleased, though him and me gets on fairly weel as a rule. He can see a joke—whiles.

"8.30!" says he, puttin' on his specs. "What kep' ye?"

"I dreamt it was the Sabbath, and slep' in," I says, as humble as I could.

"Aweel," says he, "it's a peety ye troubled to rise on ma a/c! There's your wages!" And he flung 2/- on the coonter and started to sweep oot the shop hissel'.

I'll no' deny I was surprised. "Is this the sack?" I asks, when I had got ma breath.

"It is, though ye deserve the boot," says he, sweepin' away like mad.

"But I dreamt it was the Sabbath," says I.

"That's to your credit," says he, "but it'll no' help mines. Shift!"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Clark," says I wi' great patience, for I didna see ma way to mak' a change jist then.

"I believe ye," says he. "A lad that canna rise in the mornin' is like to be sorry for a heap o' things afore he's an auld man."

"Did ye never sleep in yoursel', Mr. Clark?" I asks him, vera polite-like.

"Never!" says he, and near swep' the feet frae under me. "Never!" he says again.

I didna even wink, but I got a barrel

o' taties betwixt him and me afore I says: "Ye've been lucky, Mr. Clark."

"Maybe," says he. "There's nae luck for sleepers-in, anyway."

"I'm no' so sure aboot that," says I afore I right kent what I was sayin'.

"What?" he cries, stoppin' work and lookin' hard at me. "Would ye contera-dict me, ma lad? Vera weel! Prove your words, or tak' a crack fare this besom!" And he got betwixt me and the door.

So I tell't him an antidote aboot a chap that was for travellin' to America by sea. The chap had paid his passage and packed up his duds and everything; but on the mornin' he was to sail he slep' in and missed the boat.

"And lost a guid situation at the other end, I'll be bound!" says Clark.

"Like enough," says I, "for the job was wi' a millionaire." It jist cam' into ma heid to say that.

"Then he might ha'e married the millionaire's daughter and been a millionaire hissel'!" cries Clark, gettin' quite excited. "But he slep' in! Oh, dear, dear! he slep' in!"

"He did," says I. "And the boat was lost wi' everybody on board."

At first I was feart I had done for masel'. Clark glowered at me for ages, and then he turned and glowered at a piece of Gorgonzola cheese that wouldna sell, and mumbled "ay!" to hissel' vera slow, 6 or 7 times. Then he picked up the 2/- and put it in his pocket, and heaved the besom at me, sayin':

"I'll gi'e ye another chance, but, mind ye, it's the last!"

II

Queer Customers

YE meet wi' some queer things in the grocery trade forbye the groceries. Whiles I think the lady customers is the queerest. Clark's isna what they call an extensive premmisses; it's just a wee shop; but it's noted for quality o' provisions—"Clark's Bacon Cannot be Beat," &c.—and ye would be surprised at the variety o' customers we've got; rich & poor & great & sma' & ½ & ½. Mind ye, it's no' aye the rich that buys the best, nor the poor that buys the rottenest goods. It would astonish ye to hear what some folk in big hooses eats; but, of course, that's a trade secret. But there canna be any harm in remarkin'

a few remarks on oor chief queerosities, the lady customers.

They're no' a' alike, by any means. Some is snotty, and some is hotty, and some, I doobt, is dotty; and here and there ye strike a nice, dacent body among them. But takin' them a' roun', it beats me to ken hoo P. Clark can put up wi' them. I suppose it's the man's livin', but I'd sooner be a turk nor cow-tow to some o' them, especially the sort that looks at ye as if ye was damaged fruit, and speaks as if they was feart a loose tooth would fall oot. We've got severeal o' that brand. They walks in as if they was ower fine to breath the same air as a grocer, perfumed like a pomade factery, and ye can hardly mak' oot what they're sayin'—whether they're askin' for butter or margerine or washin' soda.

Oh, I ken fine P. Clark doesna enjoy it. One night, after the shop was shut, he

started to groan ower a postcard jist received wi' these words (I copied the p.c.):

"Mrs. Blowman-Smith is exceedingly annoyed to find that Mr. Clark has sent her 144 Fly-papers instead of 1 bot. of Cross's Finest Capers, which she most distinctly ordered. Mrs. Blowman-Smith regards the blunder as quite inexcusable, as this is not the season for flies, and will thank Mr. Clark to have his abominations removed at once."

"The Lord kens," says Clark, "that it's no' the season for flies, and I hope He kens likewise the deeficulty I had to get the papers for her. And I could swear the woman said 'a gross o' fly-papers.' but she's the sort that bites yer nose off if ye ask them to repeat their words. John, was ye no' in the shop when she gi'ed the order?"

"I was," says I; "but I thought she said finnan haddies."

"Na, na!" says he. "She ordered half a pun' o' thin cut ham, and a packet o' song-bird seed, and——"

"She should try a doze o' the seed to help her voice," says I.

But Clark wasna on for fun then. "Her a/c isna up to much," says he, "and it's aboot 9 month behind; but I wouldna like to see her gang past the shop."

"What ye'll dae wi' the fly-papers, Mr. Clark?" I asks him respectful-like. "Flies'll no' be in season for aboot 6 month yet."

"Aw," he grones, "they'll likely dry up and be a deid loss."

"Weel, then," says I, "would ye no' reduce the price and ask her to stick to them?"

At that he gi'ed a feble smile like an'

expirin' sheep. "I've thought o' smarter things than that in ma time," says he, "but it doesna pay to gi'e back-chat to a customer. We ha'e jist got to tak' it lyin' doon, ma lad."

Aweel, when Clark gets hissel' into that state there's nae use talkin'.

Next morning I called wi' the capers. The lady cam' hersel' to the back-door, and the servant gi'ed me a wink and scooted. The lady had gold glasses on her nose, which was sharp enough to ha'e dug for worms. I was rael polite; I tell't her Mr. Clark was near demented wi' grieff, and hoped she would overlook it this time. She said she hoped Mr. Clark wouldna forget to credit the fly-papers. I promised to look into the matter masel.' And then I remarked that we would soon be gettin' fine weather, and the flies would be wi' us again, no' forgettin' the wasps and bumbees and

earwigs, and a few doz. fly-papers was handy things to ha'e aboot the hoose. But it was nae use; in the end I had to tak' the lot back to the shop, feelin' gey vexed for Clark.

Some o' the ladies has awfu' little conshense for their size—something like a pea in a hogshead. To hear them, ye would think the war was merely something that made the sugar and butter scarse. There's a Mrs. Proudfit that lives in a big hoose, a mile & a ½ frae the shop, and she's the limit. A while back the young man that assisted Clark at the coonter gaed awa' to dae his bit. Clark got in a girl to fill his place, but what wi' her catchin' measles and mumps and influenzia, one after the other, she hasna been a great help, and there wasna another to be got in Kirkside. So me and Clark has had oor work cut oot.

The other afternoon, just after I had

got back frae ma last delivery (as I supposed), this Mrs. Proudfit drives up in her motor and looks into the shop, wi' her nose up and her eyes doon, for she's one o' the hotty sort, and orders a sma' tin o' Brownsbury's Cocoa to be sent at once. And then off she drives, furs and silk stockin's an' a'!

She called it "cow-cow," wi' a face like a hen takin' a drink. If another customer, Miss Prince—but she's an o.k. lady—hadna been in the shop at the time, I'm pretty sure Clark would ha'e let oot a bad word, though he has nae great skill at the cursin'. As for me, I had to shove a fig in ma mooth to keep back a dammit. Her and her "cow-cow"! If I had been Clark I would ha'e sent her a tin o' condensed milk.

Afterwards Clark said it was doobtless want of thought that prevented her takin' the 4 oz. tin in her car.

"And where does thought come frae?" said I.

"In the case o' female customers," says he, "I would be disposed to blame it on the brain. The Golden Rule doesna apply to the Grocery Trade. Weel, weel; here's her cocoa, and the sooner ye're awa', ma lad, the sooner ye'll be back."

So that was an extra 3 mile tramp in the rain, for ma bike was bein' repaired; and if her ladyship didna choke on her "cow-cow," it wasna for want o' ma prayers.

But I near forgot to tell ye what I done aboot the 144 fly-papers, which kep' prayin' on ma mind, for I was feart they would dry up afore the fly season, and I didna want P. Clark to lose the cash, especially as I would be dew a rise in June. So the next Sabbath, when ma aunt was sleepin' off an extra guid dinner,

I got to work on the clean back o' a last year's calender. And this is what I done wi' pen and ink, for I'm no ½ bad at the printin'.

DANGER!
OWING TO THE WAR THERE IS LIKELY TO BE A GREAT SCARSETY OF FLY-PAPERS IN THE COMING SEASON!

BEWARE!
NEXT SUMMER THE FLIES AND OTHER VERMING PESTS WILL PROBLY BE UNPRESIDENTED IN HISTORY!

WAKE UP, KIRKSIDE!
CUSTOMERS IS RESPECTFULLY RECCOMMENDED TO BUY THEIR FLY-PAPER AT ONCE.

P. CLARK
HAS WITH GREAT DIFFICULTY SECURED A SMALL CONSIGNMENT OF THE FINEST QUALITY. N.B.—NOT MORE THAN ½ DOZ. F. P.'s SUPPLIED TO SINGLE CUSTOMERS, BUT 1 DOZ. TO MARRIED.
SHOP EARLY!
GOD SAVE THE KING!

The next night, when I was leavin' the shop, I left it on Clark's desk. That was a fortnight back, and Clark hasna spoke aboot it; but I ken it's still in his desk, so maybe ye'll see it in the window yet. On Saturday night he gi'ed me a 2 lb. jar o' marmalade for masel'.

III

That Gorgonzola

EVERY mornin', at 8.30 a.m., promp', I sally 4th, as the book says, to seek for orders. It was kin' o' excitin' at first, when I was green to the job, but noo I'm aboot fed up wi' it. I wouldna be a comercial traveller for £1,000,000. If it wasna that P. Clark was dependin' on me, I would chuck it and become a famous explorer or something o' that sort.

It's gey wearisome workin' roun' the same auld hooses day after day, in the rottenest weather, and whiles coverin' a mile jist to be tell't "naething this mornin'." And it's exhaustin' for the brains, for ye've got to keep mind o' a' the perishin' things Clark wants to get

quit o', sich as fruit, sassiges, finnans, kippers, biled ham, etc. Clark usually tells me, afore I start, a few things to temp' the folk wi', but I whiles mention a thing on ma own a/c, and noo and then the bait gets swallowed.

I'm no' as keen on that part o' the game as I was at th' beginnin'. I got discouraged ower a bit o' cheese called Gorgonzola that had been in the shop since afore ma time, and seemed like to bide there for ever and ever. Oh, yon's a fearsome cheese!—but ye never can tell what the gentry'll be eatin' next.

I hadna been long in the shop afore I seen that P. Clark was unhappy aboot that Gorgonzola. When trade was slack he would sort o' drift ower to the shelf where it bided under a big glass cover, and stand and look at it meloncolly-like, and noo and then let oot a wee grone. I was vexed for the man—there would be

5 or 6 lb. o' the stuff—and one day I says, respectful-like, says I:

"There doesna seem to be any great run on that article, Mr. Clark."

"Nae run at a'," says he, "as far as human bein's is concerned."

"Has it gaed oot o' fashion, or what?" I asks him, for he seemed willin' to speak aboot it.

"That Gorgonzola, ma lad," says he, "was ta'en into stock to oblige a gentleman that was passionitely fond o' it. He tell't me he could guarantee to tak' at least a pun' a week, and the riper the better. But jist after he had got the first pun'——"

"Dinna tell me the blighter gaed back on his word!" I cries.

"Whisht, John!" says he, lookin' serious. "The puir gentleman is defunk. His end was vera sudden."

"I dinna wonder at that!" says I.

"But could ye no' ha'e got his widow to tak' ower the lump?"

"He was a bachelor," says Clark.

"Weel, upon ma sam," says I, "ye've had rotten bad luck. Is there naebody in Kirkside——"

"Thank ye for your sympathy," he says, and put up his hand to stop me. "We'll leave it at that." And he wouldna say another word aboot it. He's an awfu' chap to tak' things lyin' doon, is P. Clark.

After another week had rolled by, and neither him nor the Gorgonzola was lookin' ony cheerier, I thought I would tak' the thing in hand masel.' I wasna gaun to surrender wi'oot a struggle to a Gorgonzola cheese. So that night, lyin' in ma bed, listenin' to ma aunt's snoars, I made up a sort o' wee speech; and the next mornin' I mentioned the Gorgonzola at every back-door and a few front

ones. Some o' the servant girls seemed to think it was a joke, but I tell't them, if they gi'ed me an order, they would soon see it was a serious affair. I could only get one to gang and ask her mistress if she wouldna like a nice cut o' choice Gorgonzola, and she brought back word that her mistress would look in and see the cheese the first time she was in the toon—which would ha'e been quite fatle. Another girl said she would gi'e up her place if the mistress allowed sich a thing to cross the doorstep. Another said she was sure, frae its name, it was made in Germany, and Clark and me should think shame to be helpin' the enemy in sich a bare-faced fashion.

Ma aunt's aye tellin' me I ha'ena got the perseverance to succeed in anything, but that's jist her ignerance. I tell ye, I kep' on mentionin' that Gorgonzola

for near a fortnight, wi'oot gettin' a single kind word. And that wasna the worst. A lot o' the servant girls began to tak' their fun off me, and some o' them calls me Johnny Gorgonzola to this day! Sometimes they would start on it afore I could say a word. They would ask hoo Mr. Gorgonzola was keepin' this mornin', and hope he hadna had a bad night, jist as if the dashed thing was a frien' o' mines. They would ask its age, and hoo high it could jump, and was it fond o' music, and so 4th. Oh, there was nae end to the chaff, and, to tell ye the truth, I began to wish I had left the Gorgonzola to dee a nateral death.

But ye never ken your luck, no' even in the grocery trade. I had gi'ed up hope when, one mornin', I hit the bull's eye, and in the last place I expected—the Free Kirk manse. The minister's lady

happened to be at the door hersel', and frae the cock o' her eye I fancied she had rose on her right side that mornin'. So after we had got through the ordinar' business I says, very polite-like, says I:

"If ye please, ma'am, Mr. Clark, has secured"—that was true, for he had it under a thick glass cover—"a choice peice o' the finest Gorgonzola cheese——"

"Gorgonzola!" she cries.

"That's it's name, ma'am, and it's nature's the same," says I.

"Gorgonzola!" she says again, and thinks for a whiley. Then she says: "Not too ripe, is it, my boy?"

"Jist commencin' for to bud," says I. N.B.—Folk ha'e different notions o' ripeness in cheeses.

Then she bids me bide a minute, and I guessed she was off to tell the minister, though I would never ha'e said he looked a Gorgozolian.

In a wee while she comes back and says: "Yes, you may send a pound of the Gorgonzola."

I tell ye, I jist as near as near flung ma cap in the air. I couldna get back to the shop quick enough; in fac', I forgot aboot ½ a doz. calls. And I ran into the shop yellin' "Hurray!"

"Guidsake, laddie!" cries P. Clark, puttin' on his specs. "What's up wi' ye? Is't a naval victory?"

"I've got quit o' a pun' o' your auld Gorgonzola!" I tells him.

"Ye've what?" He seemed to be owercome wi' joy.

"I'm sayin' I've got quit o' a pun' o' the defunk gentleman's fancy cheese," says I. "It's been terrible hard work, but ye're welcome."

"Oh my!" says he severeal times. "What on earth made ye tak' an order for a thing I canna supply?"

"Canna supply?" I says, and sat doon in a barrel o' grapes at 8d. per lb.

"I couldna endure it in ma shop another day," he says, and groned, "and last night I took it doon to the river and drooned it."

"Gey discouragin', was it no'?"

IV

Obliging a Girl

THERE'S a great scarsety o' domestic servants in Kirkside the noo. The other day, in the shop, 2 ladies was near greetin' aboot it. They had came to inquire at Clark if he could tell o' any respectible girls that wanted a happy hame wi' plenty to eat and next to 0 to dae; nae weans, nae washin', nae late suppers excep' their own, nae coal fires excep' in the kitchen, nae margerine excep' in the dinin'-room; three nights oot a week, a ½ holiday every Wednesday, a day off twice a month; and, of course, splendid wages.

Clark wagged his heid the way he does when a customer asks for a new-laid

egg, and made a wee roun' mooth, drawin' in his breath. "Na, ladies," he says, wi' a grone, "I can gi'e ye neither help nor hope—no' if ye was to throw in season-tickets for the Cinema. The fac' is, there's no' enough girls to gang roun."

But he was wrang there. The domestics is maybe few, but the magority is gettin' roun' as fast as they can. I'm no' sleepin' when I mak' ma calls for orders, and there's hardly a mornin' but I find a new face at an auld back-door, or the other way aboot. The changes is apt to be a bit confusin', for after a fortnight or so at ma sort o' job, ye get into the habit o' writin' doon the address o' the face instead o' the name on the gate.

There's 1 girl, a hoose-table-general, that's been in 11 places since the New Year. But she's perfectly happy and

contented wi' her lots. As she says to me: "I'm welcome wherever I gang."

I dinna ken it for a fac', but there's a roumur that ladies frae big hooses is snokin' oot at nights, wi' masks on their faces, seekin' for to kidnap servant girls belongin' to their naybours. I wouldna wonder if it's true. My Aunt, bein' a landress, kens as much aboot the gentry as anybody in Kirkside can ken, and she says she wouldna wonder if it was gospel. P. Clark thinks the ladies'll be usin' 1d. whistles and bird-lime afore the war's finished. Ye see, they're fair desprate, and the girls kens it. It's a terrible disgrace in Kirkside to keep nae servant, and the more ye keep the nobler ye are.

Ma Aunt was once washin' at a hoose—she whiles gangs oot as a special favour—and in the afternoon the lady had compny that arrived suddently in a big

motor-car. When the compny was in the drawin'-room, shiftin' cookies, &c., the lady comes ootside the door and cries, as sweet as honey, to the kitchen: "So ye've got back, Maggie"; and up the stair: "Lizzie, are ye ready to go to the post now?"—and doon the passage to where the weans was locked up: "The children's tea noo, Jane." And ma Aunt swears there wasna even the gohst o' a servant in that hoose; for it was hersel' that managed the tea when the mistress was showin' the compny roun' the garden, and it was hersel' that had to feed the weans wi' bread and golden syrup to keep them frae yellin'. Oh, ye should hear ma Aunt when she's in a guid humour, which isna every fine day.

Of course, ther's some servants that isna aye on the move. Them that's up in years, for instance, There's a rare aged one at Alma Villa; she'll be 70 or 60;

been there for coontless years. Her and me gets on 1st class; she bakes champion scones. But I wouldna be her mistress for a pension. Auld Kate's the boss in that hoose; she's got to be buttered on both sides. Whiles she comes doon to the toon to coontermand an order her mistress has gi'ed when she wasna on the spot, and to ha'e a crack wi' P. Clark aboot auld times and folk that ha'e passed awa'. She doesna seem to be interested in folk that's mearly alive. But I like her, though I never seen her laugh but the once—when the Established Church minister's lum went on fire. Ye see, Kate gangs to the Free Kirk.

But I've got something to tell ye aboot the girl that's been in 11 places since the New Year. She's no auld: she was a big girl at the school when I was a young shaver. Her name's Jessie MacAdam,

and she's an orphin like masel', excep' that the aunt that brought her up was a heap softer nor mines. I hear her aunt is demented at the way Jessie's changin' places; but she needna excite hersel'. Jessie'll no' get left. She gets a rise in her wages wi' near every change she mak's. Oh, she's no' that daft!

I think I mentioned that ma bike was bein' repaired. In a way, the damnage was dew to Jessie. The bike really belongs to Clark. I'm ashamed to say it's a female bike, because ma prepossessor in the shop was a girl. She gaed into munitions, and noo she looks doon on groceries. It's no' what ye would call a class bike; it rattles and whiles sticks. But seein' it's war-time, I ha'ena the heart to touch Clark for a new one.

Weel, Jessie was awfu' keen to learn to ride. I wasna near as keen to learn her, for she's that big and fat, and I'm jist

average, and, as Clark says, it's everybody's duty to keep fit the noo. What would happen to the business if I was removed to the hospital severely injured?

So I refused to learn her. She wasna the least offended; in fac', ye would ha'e said she was pleased. For the next 10 days I never gaed to her back-door—she was thinkin' o' puttin' in a whole month at that place—wi'oot gettin' something for masel'. One time it would be a nice beef sangwich; another time, a big cup o' Bovril wi' milk—fine and cosy on a frosty mornin'; then she would pass me a handful o' figs or, maybe, dates; then sweeties; then a packet o' fags. Oh, I canna mind everything I got, but on the 2nd Saturday it was a cigar near as big as masel'.

"Where got ye this, Jessie?" says I, consealin' ma surprise.

"Oh, I can get anything I fancy in this hoose," says she. "They're that terrified o' losin' ma services. The master catched me smellin' the box, and he jist laughed and gi'ed me one for ma young man—that's you, I don't think. Smoke it after your Sabbath dinner, and ye'll feel like a toff."

Weel, I'm no' gaun to say a word aboot that cigar, excep' that if ever I've got to smoke another like it, I'll smoke it afore ma guid Sabbath dinner.

On the Monday she was so curious to hear a' aboot it that I had to put her off wi' askin' her if she had lost the notion o' learnin' to ride.

"Oh, it's naething to me," says she, "but if ye're passin' in the afternoon, I'll maybe be at home to ye."

It wasna till I was oot on the road that I noticed I had received nae gift that mornin'.

Late that afternnon I had an extra delivery to a hoose up her way—a stone o' split peas and 4 lb. o' monkey nuts for some folk that was thinkin' o' tryin' a meatless day. The goods was in the basket in front o' the bike.

I thought I would may be look up Jessie on the return journey, but when I was passin' her gate, there she was, in her black dress an' cap an' apron, as cheery as ye like.

"Stop, Johnny!" she cries. "We'll never get a better chance. The mistress is oot, wi' her best shoes on."

The next thing I kent, she was on the bike, me supportin' her for a' I was worth.

"Would it no' be safer to shove me up the hill," says she.

"Safer for you," says I. "Mind and clap on the brake when I tell ye."

It wasna a steep hill, and we was gettin' on no' so bad, when she screeches:

"Oh, mercy! yonder's the mistress comin' back! Her frien' must ha'e been oot." And she started laughin' like to end hersel'.

"Brake!" says I.

She rang the bell, and kep' on ringin' it.

"Sit up, for ony favour," says I. "Brake, ye silly elephant!"

But she was helpless wi' laughin'. And suddently she twisted the handlebars, and yellin' "Save me!" fell sideways. A gladiator couldna ha'e saved her; besides, ma foot slipped. Her and the bike cam' doon on the top o' me.

She was up in a jiffy, rubbin' her elbow but still laughin'.

I daresay I would ha'e laughed masel' if I hadna been wonderin' hoo I was to collect up the split peas and monkey nuts I was buried in.

And the next thing was a lecture frae the mistress for ill-treatin' the servant.

Then they both marched off wi'oot offerin' to pick up a single pea.

Aweel, I never yet seen any good come o' obligin' a girl.

V

The New Laid

AT the best o' times, says P. Clark, it's nae fun bein' a grocer, but in war-time it's a fair tradegy. For a long while the public had the notion that sugar was the grocer's only trouble; but little did the public dream o' the hair-tearin' that gaed on when the shutters was up. If I was wantin' to marrow your feelin's, supposin' ye've got any, I could tell ye o' hundreds o' grocerish troubles; but maybe ye wouldna understand what I was speakin' aboot, for the trade isna to be learnt in 5 minutes. I've been at it 6 month, and I dinna ken everything yet.

So I'll jist gi'e ye a single simple exam-

ple—Eggs. The magority o' ye kens what eggs is, and some o' ye maybe kens the difference betwixt fresh and new-laid. A country egg is mearly an egg laid in this country, though the toon folk imagines it's something special. In Kirkside it's been mostly Irish eggs lately, excep' to them that keeps their own fouls.

Ma aunt used to keep hens, but she got fed up wi' servin' the beasts wi' hot breakfasts every mornin' in the winter. She declared that nae new-laid in the world was worth gettin' chilblins for; and when the rush to keep poltry commenced, 2 year back, she got quit o' her wee lot at a guid price. For masel', I've nae objections to a newlaid, but if an egg is propperly fried, a few weeks is neither here nor there.

P. Clark had a try at the poltry, too, but he found he would ha'e to retire frae

the grocery trade to dae it justice. He kep' a book, and reckoned the eggs was worth their weight in silver. "It's a woman's job," he says, "for a hen is liker a woman in its ways nor a man."

Of course, if poltry's your proffession, it's another story. Mind ye, I'm no' sayin' anything against amatures, as Clark calls them, excep' that they never gi'e the hen any credit, and boast as if they had laid the eggs theirsel's.

Weel, no' long after the war started, the price o' eggs began to sore, as a commercial traveller remarked in the shop, and later on ye couldna get new-laids in Kirkside for love nor money—no' that ye would ever get rotten ones in Kirkside for mearly love. It was said that near every new-laid in the place ended at a wounded sojer, and I hope that was true. Ye're no' to think that P. Clark grudged it. I ken for a fac'

that he sent near a' his own hens' fruit, as long as he kep' them, to the nearest hospital, graetis.

But he payed for his kindness in the shop, for P. Clark had a great reputation for new-laids, and every day folk was comin' in wi' their "whys" and "whens," and botherin' the life oot o' the man. I was new at ma job then, and I tell ye it was an eye-opener to hear what stupid questions grown-up folk could ask a grocer in war-time. Naething seemed to matter to them if only they could get their blinkin' new laids, and when Clark would speir if it was for a sick person, they would tak' offence as like as no'. Ye see, if it was really for a sick person, Clark would try to get his own hens to work overtime; otherwise, no' the best customer would move him. He was ower honest to gi'e them Irish and chance it.

But there was 1 woman that got the better o' him. She was a Miss Wilk—nae relation to the seafarin' sort—a dressmaker which had retired owing to the death of her aunt which was wealthy. Oh, that Miss Wilk was a perfec' pest! She had a face like a goat eatin' a sour oranger, and 2 or 3 times a day she would be in the shop speirin' for new-laids, and remindin' P. Clark every time that he had promised her, solemn, the 1st he got into his hand. I think she had new-laids on her brains. She didna seem to ha'e anything else to think aboot. And she wasna a reglar customer, neither. It made me wild to see her gabblin' away and keepin' the reglar ones frae the coonter.

"That woman'll be the end o' me," says P. Clark, one day, wipin' the sweat frae his brow, though it was snowin' hard ootside.

"Could ye no' tell her to gang to blazes for her new-laids?" says I. "She would get them ready cooked."

He didna answer and I didna ken him weel enough then to continue the conversation.

Weel, it cam' to the New Year, and 2 or 3 days after that P. Clark cam' to the shop on a frosty mornin' wi' something in a wee box, and lookin' as prood as Punch. He called me ower to the coonter, and opened the box.

"John," says he, "did ever ye see a hen's egg like that?"

"I have," says I, "but it was a goose that done it." The egg wasna that terrible big, but it was a fair size, and I was willin' to please the man.

"I couldna help lettin' ye see it, afore it gaed to some puir sojer lad," he says. "I confess I had a notion to blow it and preserve the shell, jist to show what a

little kindness to dumb animals can dae——"

"I wouldna call hens dumb," says I, but he didna seem to hear me.

"But this is nae time," says he, "for encouragin' either museums or human conciet. And so off it gangs to the hospital!" He let oot a wee laugh, as if he was pleased.

"Hurray!" says I.

And jist then Miss Wilk cam' into the shop on her gutty soles.

"That's an egg!" she cries, and P. Clark near dropped it. I was wishin' he had.

"Ay," he says, wi' a feble smile, "ye've guessed right, Miss Wilk."

"New-laid?" she speirs, gey sharp.

I could see he was tryin' hard to tell a falsehood, but he couldna get it oot. "Ay," he says at last, like a wean afore an angry teacher.

"Then it's mines, accordin' to your solemn promise, Mr. Clark," says she. "Wrap it up!"

He thinks a wee while, and says, says he: "I hear some o' the farmers is sellin' new-laids the noo at 4/9 the dozen."

"Oho," says she. "Catch me payin' that! When ye made the promise, the price was 3/6. There's the cash!" And she slammed 3½d. on the coonter.

I could see he was gronein' inside hissel'. "But this is a special egg," he says, "and it's intended for some puir lad in the hospital."

"I beleive ye, Mr. Clark," says she, "but a bargain's a bargain. Besides, it's ower big for an invalid, anyway. It would be a mistook kindness. So hand it ower, and I'll no' trouble ye again."

"Ye mean that ye'll claim nae further new-laids," he says, switherin'.

"I'll never enter your shop again. I'm

removin' frae Kirkside the day after to-morrow."

I would ha'e gi'ed ½ a week's wages if he had handed her the egg on the nose, but he mearly took a bag frae the nail and put the egg in it and passed it ower.

"Thank ye," says she. "I see ye can be an honest man when ye like." She gi'ed a sour smile, and gaed to the door. I suppose her teeth was waterin', though they was false.

"Bide a wee, Miss Wilk," says P. Clark, and she turned at the door. "I'll gi'e ye 2/6 for that egg," says he.

She jist laughed and walked oot.

I never seen a man sae vexed.

"Oh, John," says he, "I wish, I wish a sojer had got it. I'd ha'e gi'ed her 5 bob for it."

My! I was wild! I dinna ken what possessed me, but I ran to the door and yelled:

"Boo! ye greedy auld nanny-goat!"

Maybe she heard me; anyway, she sat suddently doon on a slide some weans had raised, and when she got up she left the magority o' that new-laid behind her.

VI

Jessie

JESSIE—her that damnaged ma bike—cam' into the shop, the other day, when P. Clark was busy at the back wi' a com. traveller. P. Clark usually lets the coms. whistle when a customer is aboot, but when Jessie said she wanted but a packet o' matches, I gi'ed him the wink that I could undertak' the transaction masel'. Though I had seen Jessie near every day since her dirty treatment o' me, I had kep' strickly to the business o' receivin' and deliverin' orders, and had gi'ed her nae chance to agolopise nor mak' advances.

So noo I behaved as if she was a complete stranger to me.

"What sort o' matches might ye be wantin', miss?" I says careless-like. "We ha'e a variety o' brands."

"If ye've a brand that'll dae what matches used to dae when you and me was young, Johnny," she says, "I'll tak' it."

I ingored her remark. "Dae ye want safeties or the other sort?" I asks kind o' sharp.

"The last safeties we got was ower safe," says she. "The broon stuff on the box gaed done long afore the matches. Let's see something that'll dae the trick once in a while. Price is nae objec'."

"We canna garrantee any matches the noo. It's war time," says I.

"Still, we've got to keep the hame fires burnin', Johnny," says she.

"Ye've been keepin' a few burnin' lately," says I, speakin' sarcastic-like.

"Hoo dae ye like your new place—the 12th since the New Year—or is it the 13th?"

"I'm afraid it's no' gaun to agree wi' me," she says, turnin' up her eyes. "The master's got a beard that gets in the soup and milk puddins, and one o' the kids is learnin' the fiddle. I doobt I'm ower refined for service."

"Ye're no' losin' your fat, anyway," says I.

"Ye wouldna like me to dae that—would ye, Johnny?" says she.

"Ach, it would be nae odds to me if ye was a skelliton," says I.

"Crule, crule!" she cries, and pretended she was greetin'.

"Here, stop it!" says I. "Clark'll hear ye. The matches is 7½d."

"Charge them up," says she. "I didna think ye could be so hard-hearted.

It was bad enough when ye let me fall off the bike."

"Samson couldna ha'e held ye on. And ye marched off and left me lyin' among a stone o' split peas and dear knows hoo many monkey nuts," says I.

"I couldna help it, Johnny. Ye ken the mistress was there," says she.

"And ye've aye declared ye was feared for nae mistress, livin' or deid," says I.

"Neither I am," says she. "But ye see it was this way, Johnny. Strickly between me and you, I had made up ma mind to gi'e her warnin' that vera night, but after her seein' me on your bike I was feared she might get in her warnin' first—and nae lady has ever yet managed that on me."

"That's a' vera fine," says I, slippin' a

few sultanas into ma mooth, "but it doesna interrest me. Anyway, ye'd best be gettin' hame wi' the matches, or your mistress'll maybe be afore ye this time."

"Och, Johnny, come off your high horse," she says, cajolin'-like. "I'll pick up a' the peas next time."

"I beleive ye!" says I.

"That's better!" says she. "When can I get another lesson on your bike?"

"When I'm stark, starin' mad," says I. "The one was plenty. I hadna the use o' the bike for a fortnight after."

"I'm sorry for that, Johnny. But I'll no' tumble a 2nd time, and I'll no' laugh, niether," she says. "Com on, lad. Dinna be hard on a girl that likes ye."

But I shook ma heid, and shoved the packet to her, saying: "The matches

we're gettin' the noo doesna improve wi' age."

"My! ye're smart," says she. "Smart but crule. Aweel, I'll no' mention the bike again, though I was hopin' ye would oblige; for if I once could ride a bit, I ken a girl that would lend me hers till I could get one o' ma own. Ye see? And yours bein' a lady's bike——"

"It's Mr. Clark's," says I. "But for the war he would ha'e presented me wi' a propper man's one."

"Of course," says she; "and ye deserve a propper one. But think what an advantage it would be to me. Come, Johnny; be a white man! Ye'll never regret it."

"So ye say," says I.

"Listen," says she. "I ha'e nae engagements for this evenin'; so, if ye was takin' a ride up oor way, ye might see me at the gate—eh?"

"I daresay I would see you easier nor the gate," I says; and like a silly fool, I laughed.

"Oh, Johnny," she says, "I'm no' carin' *that* aboot the bike so long as you and me's frien's again. And we are—are we no'?" Her hand cam' slidin' across the coonter.

"I'll see aboot it," says I. But I couldna weel refuse to shake hands.

"Noo I feel better," says she. "I wouldna care if I got the sack. Ting, ting!" And wi' that she sloped.

Aboot a minute afterwards I discovered she had forgot her matches. It wasna likely I was gaun to chase after her, so I put them to the side in case she would come back. But she didna.

I canna think what made me notice them at closin' time. "Dashed nuisance," thinks I, "but it wouldna dae

for a guid customer like her mistress to be wi'oot a match in the hoose. "

So after I had ma tea I got on the bike, wi' the packet in ma pocket.

She wasna at the gate; but, of course, I had never expected to see her there. Like as no' she had left the place. And it was the mistress that cam' to the back-door.

"Matches!" says she. "Oh, but we've got plenty—severeal packets. You've surely made a mistake, my boy. But it was very good of you to come so late. Wait a minute." And she passed me a fine big apple.

I was beginnin' to think I *had* made a mistake, but I said 0 to the lady excep' "Thank ye kindly."

When I got ootside the gate, there was Jessie rollin' along on a split-new bike as if she was used to it.

"Are ye comin' for a ride, Johnny?" she cries.

"I'll see masel' jiggered first," says I.

But I went—and a while after I discovered that she was mearly wantin' to mak' a railway porter jellous. She had ta'en a' that trouble for a man wi' a game leg and a stammer. Girls is queer.

VII

The Love-sick Peter Knox

AS a rule, I mak' ma mornin' calls in the comp'ny o' Peter Knox. Peter and me was in the same class at the school, but Peter's 2 year aulder nor me. Though he was backward at his lessons, he wasna so stupid then as he is noo. He is noo attached to Goldie the fishmonger, and gettin' liker a cod every day. He shaves hissel' twice a week, and has lately took to puttin' pomade on his hair and turnin' red in the face if a girl comes doon the road.

Na; Peter's no' the man he was, and his comp'ny's nae great catch nooadays. He has become what the newspapers calls a Pessimism; he canna see the bright side

o' anything, and he aye seems to be preparin' for the worst. One day he's wishin' he hadna gaed into the fish trade; the next he's fearin' he'll get the sack. Whiles he's afraid he'll be cut off when he's prime, and whiles he wishes he was defunk on the spot. I got that defunk word frae P. Clark. I like it. It's cheerier nor "deid."

I'm gaun to tell ye the truth aboot Peter. He's got hissel' mashed on Jessie, the servant girl which damnaged ma bike. I've tell't him a doz. times he hasna a chance, but that doesna seem to help him any. For a while he was in a terrible state because he couldna get near Jessie, owin' to her bein' wi' a family which didna pateronise Goldie—some dispute aboot the perfume o' a haddie, I believe it was; and he hadna the neck to knock at the back door mearly in a frien'ly way. And of course ye'll under-

stand that it wouldna be the propper thing for him to come to the door along wi' masel'. There's customers which prefers to gi'e their grocery orders private-like; and whiles I dinna wonder at it.

Peter used to grone when I left him to gang to Jessie's door, and when I cam' back he would speir in a voice fit for a funeral:

"Hoo was she lookin' the day, Johnny?"

"Still growin', and sent her fondest love, Peter," I would reply, if I was in a cheery mood; if I wasna—"Ach, awa' and chase yoursel', ye muckle sumph! What dae I care hoo she's lookin'? It's orders I'm after, no' funny faces."

Frae the above ye might think Peter had a wonderful guid temper; but it's no' that. His spirit is completely broke wi' love.

Jist listen to what he says to me the other mornin'.

"Johnny," he says, "dae ye ever write potery noo?"

"Potery!" says I. "I ha'ena wrote potery since I was at the school. The last pome I wrote was aboot 1 o' the masters, and I got a lickin' for it. Na," says I, "I'm ower busy for potery nooadays, Peter."

"But I wish ye would write a wee pome for me, Johnny?" he says.

"Oh, if it's for you, there's nae need to waste paper," says I. "Here ye are!

"The love-sick Peter Knox
Lay doon in a herrin' box
And says, says he: 'I wish
I was mearly a blinkin' fish.
If I canna be Jessie's young man
I'd gladly be fried in a pan
And served up on Jessie's plate
For her to put me oot-o'-date!

"There's potery for ye!" I tells him.

"Ay," says he, wi' a feble smile, "it's splendid, Johnny; but it's no jist what I was requirin'. Ye see, I was proposin' to send her a present for her birthday."

"What sort o' a present?" I speirs.

"Aw, I'm no' gaun to tell ye that," says he. "But if ye write the potery to suet me, I'll stand ye a 20-packet o' Yellow Perils."

"Done!" says I. "Ye'll be wantin' the pome to gang wi' the present. Weel, ye're lucky to ha'e Peter for a name. It rymes wi' sweeter and neater and gas-meter——"

"Ah, but I dinna want ma name mentioned," he says, "I want to be an—an—What does a gentleman call hissel' when he's ashamed o' gi'ein' a subscription to the Kirk and the like?"

"I ken the word ye mean," says I, "but I couldna spell it. Besides, the

only word to ryme wi' it would be hipopottamus. Better jist call yersel' Cupid —eh?"

"Na, that wouldna dae, niether," he says, scratchin' his heid. "Ye see, it's like this. I dinna want to tell her wha' the sender is, but I wouldna mind her guessin'."

"Well, then," I says, "the only way is to put in something aboot fish or poltry. That would gi'e her a bit hint, Peter."

"But I'll no' ha'e ye mak' a cod o' me," he says sharp-like, and couldna see what I laughed at.

"I'll no' dae that, Peter," I tells him, and after some more talk it was arranged that I would ha'e the pome ready next mornin'.

"Mind, it's no' to be funny," was his partin' words.

"I'm no' daft," says I. "I want to earn the fags."

I kep' the hoose that night. When I sat doon at the fireside after ma tea, ma aunt said naething, but I seen her squintin' at me a' the time she was washin' up. Later on she cam' and sat doon hersel', wi' one o' her penny novels, but she couldna read for curiosity.

"Are ye no' weel?" she speirs at last.

"I'm fine," says I.

"But—but what are ye daein' naething for?" she says.

"Keep your hair on," says I, quite pleasent-like. "I'm thinkin'."

"Thinkin'!" she cries, dumfoondered.

"Ay. Read your story and let me ha'e peace," says I.

After a while she dried up.

Oh, it wasna so easy. Ye see, I couldna ha'e started writin' doon potery afore her, and I had to dae it in ma heid like mental arithmetic. I intended for to be extra early at the shop in the mornin',

and write it doon there. But I wasna in guid form, and after I gaed to ma bed, what wi' ma aunt's snoarin' and ma own thinkin', I didna sleep till near 3 a.m. So I slep' in and got a lecture frae P. Clark, but after a' I dinna think the pome was that bad. This was it:

"Oh, Jessie's is the boniest face
I ever seen in any *plaice.*
Her nose is not the least bit red,
Nor is the *hares* upon her head.
I love her with my heart and *sole*
And admire her greatly on the hole.
I only wish I had the pluck
To call her my little darling *duck.*
This costly gift I send to thee,
And happy may thy birthday be!
Ye'll never, never guess what laddie
Remains your loving *Finnan Haddie.*"

I underlined a' the words that had to dae wi' Peter's trade, and I was pretty sure he would be pleased.

But when I met him on the road, he

said never a word aboot potery. And when I was for showin' it to him, he says, says he:

"Oh, that's off, Johnny. I'll no' need it noo."

"Off!" says I, fair took aback.

"Listen, and I'll tell ye," says he, wi' a grone. "Last night I spied her canoodlin' wi' a rotten railway porter. So I decided for to save ma shillin' and the price o' postage."

"That's right enough," says I. "But what aboot ma fags? Here's the pome ye ordered."

"But I'm tellin' ye it's off," says he.

Gor, I was angry! "Then off wi' your coat!" I says.

But he would neither fight nor pay, and at last I left him in what the book calls high gudgeon. I thought o' sendin' Jessie the pome along wi' the tail o' a kipper

I had for ma tea that night. But I didna: it seemed below the belt.

Next mornin', hooever, Peter turned up wi' the Yellow Perils.

"A bargain's a bargain, Johnny," says he.

I was delighted at his reformation.

"We'll split them, Peter," says I. "And there's the pome, if ye want it."

He took it and cast his eye ower it, and groned. But after a while he says, says he:

"Weel, weel, I'll keep it in the meantime. The name could easy be changed."

VIII

Rewards of Industry

I WAS jist startin' for the shop, the other mornin', when postie brought ma aunt a letter.

"Wait!" says she. "This is frae your uncle. He'll be here in the afternoon."

I suppose I let oot a bad word, for she cries sharp-like: "What did ye say?"

"It was a bit o' ma breakfast got stuck in ma neck," I tells her.

"Some fine mornin' ye'll choke," she says. "Can ye no' rise earlier and tak' time to your meat?"

"I'll see what can be done," says I. "Can I gang noo?"

"Ay, ye can gang noo; but, mind ye, ye're no' to leave the hoose the night, when your uncle's here."

"I've got an appintment at the Cinema," I says, to tease her, and sloped.

Ma uncle comes to Kirkside once a year. He's ma trustee, whatever that means; sma' guid to me, anyway. He arrives aboot 4 p.m. Ma aunt feeds him on scones and tea, and they sit and crack till 6—for the landry can gang to blazes when ma uncle's visitin'. I daresay she tells him a' the bad things I've done durin' the year. At 6.30 she gi'es him a fried fish tea, and he's a champion fish-shifter. After that he sort o' dozes at the fireside, and wakens up noo and then to ask me a question or gi'e me some advice about bein' steady at ma work—it used to be ma lessons—and savin' the bawbees. At 9.30, she gi'es him toasted cheese and cocoa, and then he gangs to his bed and mak's hissin' noises wi' his nose a' night long. In the mornin' she gi'es

him a breakfast that would feed up an elephant, and then he catches his train.

There's naething really wrong wi' ma uncle, excep' that he never laughs nor smiles. He's a great big man wi' a wee sma' heid wi' a few hairs stuck across it.

In the back shop, that day, I noticed P. Clark makin' fiddle-faces at oor collection o' empties—biscuit tins, jam jars, etc.

"They're pilin' up, Mr. Clark," I remarks to him. "We'll soon ha'e room for naething else in the premmises."

"That's a fac'," says he; "but until Miss Moubray comes back to her work at the coonter I canna hope to get them sent away. I hear she's improvin', but the flue's a slow disease."

"I could come back at night and pack them up for ye," says I.

"Could ye?" he says surprised-like.

"Easy!" says I. "I'll come the night, as soon as I've had ma tea."

"If ye dae that," says he, "I'll no' forget it, John. I'll be workin' here masel' at the books which is terrible behind. Are ye sure ye can manage it?"

"Can a duck swim?" says I, and he gi'ed a bit laugh, and it was settled.

When I got hame at night, they had commenced their tea. Ma aunt glowered at me, though she kent I couldna ha'e managed earlier. Ma uncle held oot his hand and hoped he seen me in guid health.

"The same to you," says I, respectfullike, and gaed to ma place where ma aunt had set a piece o' fish I could ha'e put in ma eye. But I let it pass.

After a while ma uncle remarks: "So ye're in business noo, John."

I nodded, for I didna see that there was anything to say, but ma aunt cries:

"Answer your uncle propper when he speaks to ye, ye careless boy!"

"I hope ye're industrious," says ma uncle in a hurry, for he likes peace when he's stokin'.

"I doobt it!" says ma aunt afore I could open ma mooth.

I was gey angry. "Ye'll hurt yoursel' in a minute," I tells her ablow ma breath.

"Dae ye hear what he's sayin'?" she cries to ma uncle.

"This is capital fish, Maggie," says he. "I believe I could swallow another grain or so."

"I'm industrious enough," I says to him. "I've got to gang back to the shop the night."

"Weel, weel!" says he, "that's a real proof o' industry."

"Gang back to the shop!" says ma aunt. I could see she was thinkin' o' the Cinema.

"Jist that," says I, as if I was tired o' hearin' her.

She dried up then, and I left afore they had finished eatin'.

"Mind," she cried after me, "ye've got to be hame afore your uncle gangs to his bed." I suppose she hadna the neck to mention her unseemly suspicions afore him.

It wasna much fun packin' up the auld empties, but it was cheerier nor sittin' dumb wi' a sleepy uncle and a girny aunt. For a while I thought the empties would never come to an end though I didna want that to happen ower early either. I had but the 1 mishap: when I knocked doon a reglar Tower o' Bable o' tins and P. Clark near jumped oot o' his skin. But he wasna angry; in fac' he was feared I had hurt masel'.

About 9 p.m. him and me took a rest

and he smoked his pipe and I had a feed o' tea-biscuits and lemonade and bashed dates. Oh, it wasna ½ bad, and P. Clark was cheerier nor ever I seen him afore. I could ha'e finished the packin' at 9.30, but I made it last till 10, so as to be sure o' ma uncle bein' fed up wi' cheese and cocoa and sleepiness.

"Ye're the right sort, John," says P. Clark, when I was leavin', and I tell't him he was welcome, and meant it.

I expected some chat from ma aunt, but though she was snuffy as usual, she mearly said I'd best hurry to ma bed and no' sleep in and affront her afore ma uncle, which was already commencin' to hiss. So off I gaed, gey pleased wi' masel', and never dreamin' hoo much better pleased I would be in the mornin'.

For what dae ye think? Ma uncle cam' ben to his breakfast when I was aboot to bolt for the shop.

"Jist a minute, John," says he, vera solemn-like. "Last night I took a walk to masel', and gaed up by your employer's shop. Observin' a peep-hole in the door, I keeked in, and was extremely gratified to behold your industry. In fac', I was that filled wi' gratification, I decided to show it in more nor words. Tak' this, John," says he, and held oot half-a-croon.

Ye could ha'e knocked me doon wi' a fender. But I cam' quick enough to ma senses, for ma aunt had put forward her claw, saying: "I'll tak' charge o' it for him."

I nabbed it by the skin o' its teeth. "Thank ye," I says to ma uncle. "Ye're a white man." And somehow I was a wee bit sorry I hadna finished packin' the empties as soon as I could.

"But dinna be late for your work," says he, so I got away.

When I arrived at the shop, P. Clark says to me, says he:

"John, I've decided to advance your wages 2/."

This time I hadna a word to say. I mearly shook hands wi' him. Ye see, I'm no' used to luck, much less rewards o' merit.

That day I wouldna ha'e been surprised at anything—no' even if ma aunt when I tell't her aboot ma rise, had stood on her heid and sang "Rule Brittania!" But of course she didna dae that, or anything like it.

"I hope ye'll live to deserve it, John," says she, "but I ha'e ma doobts."

IX

A Piece of Silver

LAST Monday was Black Monday in the shop.

To begin wi', Miss Moubray, her wi' the flue, was to ha'e come back to her work, and seein' it was a terrible cold day P. Clark was waitin' for her wi' Oxo smokin' hot. But her mother arrived to say she wasna so weel again, and wouldna manage back for another week. I got the Oxo, but I was sorry for P. Clark. He's been feelin' the want of Miss Moubray, and so as his corns.

Then the railway van delivered a case o' Irish eggs, which seemed to ha'e been in a collision or an earthquake. It was a horrid job, rescuin' the few survivers

and makin' them look like respectible eggs again.

"This is the limit," says P. Clark; but he was wrong by a mile, for an hour later ma bike done a skid, and I cam' doon, wi' a variety o' goods in the mud. Some o' them, sich as ham and cheese, was cleanable, but things like ground rice and tea-biscuits could never be made to look the same again.

It was ma turn to talk aboot the limit; but I was wrong likewise, for when I got back to the shop I found P. Clark gronin' ower a bad 2s. piece he had got frae a customer, a Mrs. Bardie, an awful prood lady that puts flour on her nose, and has a gold tooth, and keeps one o' yon wee fancy sick-like dogs that wouldna face a black beetle.

"Weel, Mr. Clark," says I, "I trust ye're no' gaun to tak' *this* lyin' doon."

"What can I dae?" says he.

"Dae?" says I. "Tell her it's bad!"

He shook his heid. "Na, na; that would never dae," he says. "She would never enter the shop again."

"Ye'll never be a millionaire off customers like her," says I.

"Tits, laddie!" says he, "ye're takin' it for granted that she tried for to diddle me—a wealthy lady like her!"

"I wouldna put it past her," says I. "Would an honest lady seek to disguise her red nose?"

"Ay, and an honest man too, if he had the pluck," says P. Clark. Then suddently he laughs. "Man, John, ye're a caution!" says he.

"I dinna like ye bein' diddled," says I. "But her honesty's neither here nor there. Ye're 2 bob oot, and it's up to her to mak' it guid to ye. If ye would leave the job to me, Mr. Clark——"

"Na, na," he says very quick. "We'll

jist nail it to the coonter, alongside the bad half-sovereign I got in the year o' jubilee, 1897, and consider it a bad debt."

"Aw, dinna dae that. Remember it's war time," I says to him. "If ye'll no' let me gang to Mrs. Bardie, what price the Kirk plate?"

"John," says he, drawin' hissel' up, "would ye ha'e me diddle the Kirk?"

"The Kirk's no' that easy diddled," says I. "Either that, or the minister and elders dinna ken bad money frae guid."

"What mak's ye say that?" he asks sternlike.

"If ye like, I'll tell ye an antidote," says I.

"Proceed," says he.

"There was once a wee village and a Kirk and a bad half-croon," says I. "And every Sabbath that same bad half-croon gaed to the Kirk. and fell into the

plate. Noo, hoo dae ye account for that, Mr. Clark?"

"The honesty o' that village must ha'e been in a low state, John," he says, rubbin' his chin.

"But the village only gi'ed back what it got," says I. "That's plain enough."

"I suppose," he says, speakin' slow, "that sich a thing is possible, but I confess I dinna see your p'int, ma lad."

"The p'int's jist this," says I. "The half-croon kep' circulatin', and naebody was a penny the worse. D'ye no' see?"

He didna appear holy satisfied. "Kirkside isna a wee village," he says, "and the treasurer o' ma Kirk is Mr. McFarlane, the banker."

"Weel, it'll be fine and easy for him to pass it on," says I. "Jist you drop it in next Sabbath, Mr. Clark, and think nae mair aboot it. It's no' as if ye was gettin' goods for it."

But it was nae use. He hadna the nerve. He gi'ed me a wee lecture and put the 2s. piece in a tin he keeps stamps in, at the back o' the till.

A few days rolled by. He never mentioned the thing, but whiles when he was workin' at his books in the back corner, I would hear a wee dammit, and I guessed what was hurtin' him. And then cam' Friday.

As a rule, we're busy on Friday afternoons, but this time it was rainin' something terrible, and the street was deserted. P. Clark was fiddlin' at things doon in the cellar, and I was tyin' up parcels, when a cab stopped at the door and oot got Mrs. Bardie.

"By jings!" says I to masel', "if this isna Providence, I'm jiggered!"

I scooted to the back o' the shop, let doon the trap door wi'oot a sound, managed to shove a case o' corned beef and

a chest o' tea on the top o' it, and was back behind the coonter afore ye could ha'e asked a blessin'.

Mrs. Bardie mearly wanted a packet o' Puppy Biscuits. She had her ugly wee beast under her arm.

"What a beautiful little dog!" says' I, wi' the sort o' smile ye get in a draper's.

She was quite pleased. "Do you know about dogs, my boy?" says she, and kisses the rotten wee thing.

The sight near turned me sick, but I says most polite-like, says I: "I ken a guid dog when I see it, ma'am. I've got an uncle which is a dog fancier." It was true enough, for ma uncle fancies every dog he sees wants a bit o' his leg. "Ay, yours'll be gey valuable," I says.

That pleased her still better, but I had to cut short the conversation because P. Clark was beginnin' to knock at the

trap-door. I suppose he had heard her comin' into the shop.

"That'll be 6d., if ye please," I says; and my heart was in ma mooth for fear she would put doon onything less nor half-a-croon.

When she put doon a 2s. piece, I thought I was done; but I'm no' easy beat. I threw it in the till and made a great work o' huntin' for change. Then I says to her, says I:

"We're short o' sma' change the day, ma'am. If ye could gi'e me half-a-croon, I could manage it." And I gi'ed her back her 2s. piece—the bad one.

When she put doon half-a-croon, I was surer nor ever it was Providence.

As soon as she shifted hersel' I gaed and let P. Clark oot. He wasna extra pleased.

"Ye'll laugh in a minute, Mr. Clark," says I.

But he didna. He wagged his heid and rubbed his nose, and after a while he says solemn-like, says he:

"Surely it's plain to ye noo that Mrs. Bardie didna diddle me wittin'ly. But you, John, was aware the money was bad, and ye diddled her deliberately. So afore ye finish here the night, ye'll gang to her hoose wi' a genuine 2s. piece, and get back the bad one. Ye'll explain that I had omitted to nail it to the coonter. Hold your tongue!" says he. "What I ha'e said I ha'e said."

Weel, I hope I ken when a man's in earnest, and when I'm beat. Aboot 6 p.m. I gaed to Mrs. Bardie's hoose, wi' ma tail between ma legs.

But ye never ken your luck. I cam' back wavin' it on high.

"Weel, John," says P. Clark, lookin' kind through his specs, "ye've done your disagreeable duty, and I'll say nae mair

excep' to repeat to ye that honesty's the best policy."

"It is that," says I, and lays 2s. on the coonter.

"Oh," he cries, "but this is a guid one!"

"It is," says I. "She couldna mind where she had spent the bad one."

"Dear, dear!" says he.

"And she gi'ed me a bob to masel'," says I.

X

Miss Moubray

MISS MOUBRAY'S back at the coonter again at last. She turned up unexpected on Thursday, aboot 10 p.m., and P. Clark was terrible glad to see her. He burnt his fingers bilin' water on the gas-ring to mak' an Oxo for her.

I canna say I seen a great difference on her, considerin' she'd had the mumps, measels and flue wi' only a fortnight betwixt each. She's no' a bad lookin' girl, if ye like them black-haired and skinny. At the beginnin' P. Clark warned me she was a superior sort o' girl, and I'd better no' tak' libberties wi' her. I wondered what he took me for. Of course he kens me better noo.

While P. Clark was busy burnin' his fingers I had a bit crack wi' her.

"It's you for the diseases," says I, passin' her a fig, jist to be upsides wi' Clark. "But I see there's life in the auld dog yet."

She smiled. She's got bonny teeth. I thought they was false till I once tried her wi' a bit o' extra tough toffy.

"I'm glad to be back, Johnny," she says, "but I've had an awful bad time, and I'm not feeling up to much yet, so I hope you'll not start tormenting me all at once."

"When did I ever torment ye?" says I. I never done anything to her excep' put rice in her bumberstick and pin a label wi' "Real Honey" on it to her back, when she was gaun for her dinner.

"Well, we'll let bygones be ditto," says she, nibblin' at the fig. "How

have you and Mr. Clark been getting along all those weeks without me?"

"Bearin' up and nae mair," says I. "His corns has been missin' ye, but ye'll be glad to hear he got quit o' yon aged Gorgonzola."

"Not sold!" she cries.

"It might ha'e been if he hadna drooned it in the river in dispair," says I.

She laughed till I thought the fig had gaed the wrong road. But jist then P. Clark cam' forward wi' the Oxo, lookin' as bashful as if he was gaun to dae a recitation.

If he was younger, I would say he was sweet on Miss Moubray, but I ken he pets her mearly because shop assistants is that scarse at present, though she's gi'ed him dash little assistance so far. Hooever, we canna blame her for the mumps, &c. And she was rael nice to him aboot the Oxo.

"Oh, Mr. Clark," she says, "it's far, far too kind of you!"

"Not at all," says he aboot ½ a dozen times, as red as a penny stamp. "We've a' got to tak' care o' oor healths in these times. See and no' overtax your strength, Miss Moubray; if ye feel wearied, be sure and let me ken." He turned and left her as if he was ashamed o' hissel'.

"And how's business, Johnny?" she asks me.

"Gey rotten," I tells her. "Ye'll be kep' busy learnin' the new prices o' goods we canna get, and tellin' the customers we're oot o' this, that and the other thing. Afore long, Mr. Clark says, a grocer'll ha'e nae mair variety in his shop nor an undertaker. Oh, your hair's comin' doon, Miss Moubray! At least there's a wee tail thing hangin' oot o' your bun."

"Is there?" says she, layin' the cup on

the coonter and puttin' up both her hands.

"Hullo!" says I. "That's a braw new ring ye've gotten! Are ye engaged?"

She turned the colour o' tinned salmon and gi'ed a wee laugh.

"Yes," says she. "I'm engaged, Johnny."

"Wonders'll never cease!" says I, though it wasna jist what I had meant to remark. "Has he named the happy day?"

"Nonsense!" says she. "It won't be till the war's over. You see, he's on active service."

"Guid for him!" I says. "Then he would propose to ye when he was on leave, Miss Moubray?"

She nodded, gettin' pink again.

"When did it happen?" I asks her, respectful-like.

"Nearly 3 months ago, Johnny," she

replies. "Now it's high time I was getting to work."

"Wait a minute," says I. "It wouldna be when ye had the mumps—eh?"

"No, just before," says she.

"Ye've had a narrow escape," says I.

She seemed to be sort o' annoyed, but jist then a customer cam' in.

I retired to the back where P. Clark was sittin' at his desk, makin' faces at an account in his ledger.

"Mr. Clark," says I, "I've news for ye. Miss Moubray's for gettin' married."

He jamp as if I had put the ham knife in him.

"Ma goodness!" he cries. "Mumps, measels, inflenuzia—and noo marriage, which is fatle! Where in Kirkside will I get another assistant?" He grones something terrible.

"Cheer up!" says I. "It's no immediate—no' till the war's by."

"Oh," says he, wipin' the sweat frae his brow, "ye might ha'e said that at first, John. Ye gi'ed me a turn. Aweel, I suppose I'll ha'e to congratulate her."

Later on I heard him daein' it, and then he got her intended's name and address, and wrote doon a list o' guid things to send to him, graetis. I'm no' jellous, but I couldna help wonderin' what *I* would ha'e got if I had come back to the shop after 3 months o' mumps, etc. A nice kick done up in a lovely sack, I suppose! A' the same, P. Clark's no' a bad chap.

After hearin' him talk to her, I felt it was up to me to dae something in the congrat line likewise; besides, I wanted to show her I had had nae intentions o' hurtin' her feelin's aboot the mumps. So I thought I would write her a bit potery sutiable to the lucky event.

I hurried through ma afternoon deliv-

eries, and managed to get peace and quietness for 20 minutes or so in Mrs. McGomeril's hen-hoose. Her hens is defunk owin' to a party feedin' them on poisoned barley for wakenin' him ower early in the mornin'. The case is gaun to the court, I hear, and everybody in Kirkside is gettin' ready to laugh.

Weel, this is the pome. I think Miss Moubray was pleased wi' it on the hole.

To Miss K. Moubray, On Her Plight of Troth

"I'm pleased to hear ye've got a lad,
For lads is scarse the noo.
I winna speir if you chased him
Or he ran after you.
The ring ye've gotten sure enough,
And so ye needna fash—
It must ha'e cost a pound, which proves
Ye really are his mash.
Cheer up! and think o' love instead
O' measels, mumps and flue;
Even though ye catch the hoopin' cough,
I've nae doobt he'll keep true.

I hope ye'll live 100 years
And be a blushin' bride,
And ha'e a cake as big's yoursel',
Wi' sugar (real) ootside.
And I hope ye'll no' forget to send
A lump to Johnny Pryde."

XI

Dolly Tosh

GENTILE reader, was ye ever chased by a girl? If so, I expec' ye would feel as I dae aboot it. It's nice enough for a wee while, but ye soon get fed up and would preffer a mad bull after ye—eh?

The girl that's chasin' me the noo is Dolly Tosh. She was at the school wi' me, but was twa classes above me, and I never had ony truck wi' her excep' to put oot ma tongue at her noo and then. I mind she fancied hersel' for a beauty, and I'll grant ye I've seen uglier nor her in Kirkside. After she left the school she was wi' Samson the draper for a couple o' years, and then, aboot 6 month

back, she gaed into munitions at Barryfield, a long road frae here. Noo she's back in Kirkside again, as large as life, wi' a pocketful o' money, tellin' everybody she's suspended for a month or so.

She's a great swell, wi' her fancy stockins and tricky shoes and fur tippet, etc. She put her hair up when she went to the munitions, but she has become a flapper again, for her mother says she couldna ha'e her gang aboot Kirkside in sich short dresses, and Dolly would rather gang back to her pigtail nor be oot o' the fashion. Folk turn to look at her on the street, but she doesna mind; in fac', I think she preffers it.

The first time I met her was an afternoon on the Scriven road. We ha'e jist the 1 customer oot that way, but she's a guid one, and I was pushin' ma bike up the brae wi' a heavy load o' best gro-

ceries, when I spied Dolly Tosh sittin' on a milestone, smokin' a fag. I didna expec' she would speak, but—

"Hullo, Johnny Pryde," says she, "dae ye no' remember me?"

"Fine," says I, "in spite o' your disguise."

"But ye was for passin' me by," says she. "Maybe ye're bashful?"

"I dinna think that would be ony use," says I. "Hoo are ye keepin'?"

"Fine," says she, and asks where I was bound for. "I'll gi'e ye a convoy, if ye like," she says.

"I dinna mind," says I, for I was keen on hearin' aboot the munitions, and I wasna likely to meet many folk on that road. "Hoo are ye gettin' on, Dolly?" I enquires frien'ly-like.

"Oh, jist aboot killed wi' excitement, I don't think," she says. "I'm fed up wi' Kirkside already. It's deidly dull.

Let's ha'e some refreshments." She opened her wee bag and offered me a fag and then sweeties—the sort o' sweeties ye see in picturs.

"Ma goodness!" I exclaims, "ye didna buy *them* at 6d. the lb."

She laughed and shoved the poke at me. "If ye like them, tak' the lot," says she.

I was that surprised, I took them, no' forgettin' to thank her.

Weel, she walked a' the way wi' me, and back again, and we parted jist ootside the toon. She had tell't me a lot aboot munitions, and I could see she had been daein' her bit. I thought she wasna ½ a bad sort, and I took the lecture I got frae P. Clark for bein' late wi'oot a murmur.

Oh, but I was green! It wasna till I met her for the 4th time on the Scriven road that I seen anything peaculier in

her bein' there. For I had never really believed that a girl would chase a man, unless she was gettin' up in years, like ma aunt.

But mind ye, I'm no' conceited. I dinna set up to be an Apolonaris, or whatever they called the Roman chap that was sich a lady-killer in his day. I ken fine it's a' entirely dew to the great scarsety o' young single men in Kirkside the noo. In fac', there's practically nae choice for a girl like Dolly Tosh excep' between a railway porter and Peter Knox and masel'. And the porter has a game leg and a stammer, and Peter's apprenticed to a fish-monger, which is an honest trade, but niffy, and I'm jist ordinary—so there ye are! I ken she wouldna look at me in peace time, and I'm ower young for her, anyway; but a' that doesna mak' it any better for me.

I tell ye, I got the cauld shivers when I

seen what was up. It wasna what she said; it was the way she kep' squintin' at me—oh, it was fair sickenin'!—as much as to say: "Will ye be ma mash?" Hoo I wished I had never ta'en her sweeties and fags! But for that I could ha'e mounted ma bike and left her to whistle. But I never done a dirty mean thing if I could help it.

This time she didna leave me ootside the toon; na! she cam' right to the shop door wi' me! I wasna cauld then! I was sweatin'! Fortunitely P. Clark didna notice anything. But the next mornin' she nabbed me when I was gaun roun' for orders, and said she was gaun to get her mother to get her groceries frae Clark, so as she would be able to drop into the shop frequent-like. Of course I couldna tell her that P. Clark kep' rotten bad stuff. I jist had to try and look glad to hear it.

But the worst happened yesterday—on the Scriven road again. I had been tryin' to let her see that I wasna keen on her comp'ny, but ma hints was nae mair to her nor a split pea to a rinocerious. She kep' on bein' as sweet as treacle, and every noo and then she would dunt against me as if by accident. And suddently she gi'ed ma arm a squeeze and says, says she:

"Johnny, lad! what price the pictur' hoose for you and me the night?"

"Oh, I'm sorry," says I, "but I'm hard up the noo. I really canna afford it." It wasna exac'ly the truth, but I was gettin' desprate.

"Never you heed aboot that, Johnny," says she, and her voice was softer nor the cauld cream ye get frae the druggist. "Jist you leave it to me."

"Ye mean that you'll pay?" says I, feelin' ma face hot.

"It'll be ma funeral," says she, wi' a laugh.

Weel, it's no' so easy to look insulted as to feel it; it's easier to look like a sheep. But I done ma best to show her I didn't like it. In fac', I tried to get up a quarrel. But she wouldna ha'e that.

"Dinna be so nasty and prood," says she.

"I never yet let a girl stand treat," says I, "and I'm no' gaun to begin noo. Thank ye a' the same."

"Ye've hurt ma finest feelin's," says she, and wi' that she started greetin'. I canna think where she got the tears, but they cam' oot right enough. And the scent on her hanky was like to knock me doon.

"Oh, stop it!" says I, and then I seen some folk comin' along the road. "Stop it, and I'll tak' ye to the pictur' hoose next week."

"Is that a promise?" she cries, blowin' her nose.

"Ay," says I. "So long." And I got on ma bike and left her.

What am I to dae? I canna break ma word, and it doesna seem worth while breakin' ma neck. I suppose it'll ha'e to be the 1s. seats. Aweel, after next week I'm finished wi' women!

XII

Dolly Again

THE weather was rotten for the next 2 or 3 days, but I wasna sorry, for it kep' Dolly Tosh off the Scriven road. Unfortunitely it had got aboot that I had been seen wi' her there, and on Monday mornin', when we was gaun roun' for orders, Peter Knox, him that I wrote the potery for, had the neck to speak aboot Dolly. Though he's learnin' to be a fishmonger he's a silly lovey-dovey sort o' chap, and he didna try to be funny. But that made it a' the worse.

"Are ye askin' for a bat on the nose?" says I, gey angry.

"True love has naething to be ashamed o', Johnny," says he. "Ye needna be afraid I'll laugh at ye."

"Ye wouldna laugh twice," says I.

"Come, come," says he, as if he was a grandfayther. "I ken what it is. Ye can confide in me, and I'll never betray ye."

"Awa' and eat grass!" says I. "If ye canna talk sense, dry up."

He dried up, or it would ha'e been the worse for him.

I can tell ye, I was annoyed at the thing becomin' a public scandle, and I felt to tak' the girl to the pictur' hoose would simply put the lid on. I would never hear the end o' it. Still, I was bound to keep ma promise to her. Ma only hope was that she would be called back quick to the munitions at Barryfield. But no sich luck for me.

When I got hame frae the shop on Tuesday night, I seen that ma aunt had got her monkey up. That didna excite me, for it's oftener up nor doon. She

stopped in the middle o' fillin' the tea-pot, and p'inted to a postcard on the mantlepeice. It was addressed to me.

"What's that?" says she.

"It looks liker a postcard nor a cheese, does it no'?" says I, takin' it doon. It had the mug o' a play-actress on the back and writin' that said: "Tuesday night will suet me fine. I'll be there at 7.30—D. T."

There's nae use pretendin' it didna gi'e me a shake-up; but I managed to gi'e a nod as much as to say I had expected the card, and put it in ma pocket.

"Wha's D. T.?" yells ma aunt.

"Eh?" says I, puttin' ma hand to ma ear.

"Oh, I read your card," says she. "Postcards is open to be read."

"So they are," says I. "I hope ye enjoyed the pretty pictur'."

"Wha's D. T.?" she yells again.

"Ye're lettin' the water gang off the boil," I says.

"Answer me!" says she.

"Ye can ha'e 13 guesses for a 1s.," says I.

If she had asked me nice-like I might ha'e let her guess free o' charge.

I thought I was never gaun to get ma tea that night, and I had a terrible rush to get tidied up for the rotten event. I tried to sneak oot o' the hoose, but she nabbed me.

"Whaur are ye gaun, John?" says she.

"Oot," says I.

"What for ha'e ye got on yer Sabbath tie?" says she.

"To let it see what Tuesda's like." And to tease her I says: "Ye needna wait up for me. I'll be hame aboot 3 g.m."

"If ye're a second after ten, ye'll find the door bolted to ye."

Weel, I'll allow she had me that time.

I got to the pictur hoose at 7.30, and after aboot 20 minutes or so Dolly turned up. She was dressed to kill at 1000 yds., and I was glad to get her into the dark inside.

"Was ye surprised to get ma note, Johnny?" she whispers.

"I'm no' that easy surprised," I answered.

"Was ye glad?" says she.

My! it tak's a girl to ask a real stupid question. I didna want to tell a rank falsehood, and yet I didna want to hurt her feelin's.

"What dae ye think?" says I. Then I put a big poke o' sweeties—P. Clark had let me ha'e them at cost—on her lap and tell't her to get busy.

"Oh, Johnny, ye're ower kind," she says, and gi'ed ma hand a squeeze.

"Stop it," says I. "Pay attention to your jujubes and the pictur's."

"The pictur's is putrid," says she. "I'm vexed I was late, Johnny, but I was packin' up. I'm gaun back to the munitions in the mornin'."

"Are ye?" says I

"Are ye sorry?" says she.

"So, so," says I. "Ye're no' eatin'."

"Ye can keep your jujubes," she says, sort o' angry-like. "I wish I hadna came the night."

"Dinna be a silly goat," says I, as kind as I could. I was perspiring like 1 o'clock.

"I believe ye hate me," says she.

"Hate ye! Dae ye think I would ha'e burst a shillin' on ye if I had hated ye?" says I. "Cheer up and behave yoursel', Dolly."

But in the end I had to tak' her hand to keep her frae greetin'. I never seen sich a girl for softness.

We didna talk much after that, but she punished the jujubes. I could tell when she was eatin' a pink one by the smell o' her breath, which whiles tickled ma ear. I was feart to move in case she would be offended, but at last I got pins and needles in ma arm and had to ask her to shift hersel'. She made me swop seats wi' her. I canna mind the names o' the pictur's, but they was extreamly fine.

At 9.30 she did surprise me wi' sayin' it was time to move.

"Bide a wee," says I. I canna tell ye what made me say it.

"We've got to gang home for hot supper," says she. "Ma mother's expectin' ye, Johnny."

"Me?" says I. "Hot supper!"

"Dinna refuse," says she. "It's ma last night at hame. We may never meet again."

Of course I couldna tell her I would be

locked out if I was hame later nor ten. But I didna see hoo I was to get the hot supper on board afore that time. I wished she had spoke earlier, but it wouldna ha'e been the thing to say that.

"Come on," says she, gettin' up. "Mother's made one o' her special steak puddin's."

Hoo could I refuse? Jist then I didna care a bashed date if I had to walk the streets a' night.

We left the pictur' hoose. It was pitch dark, and she took ma arm. I didna objec'. It pleased her and didna hurt me. Besides, I've seen uglier nor Dolly Tosh.

I wasna sorry I gaed to her hoose. Her mother was as nice as nice, and her fayther was fine and hearty, and her wee sisters and brothers had naething wrong wi' them. And the puddin' was fair champion. I'll never see its like again.

It was 11.15 p.m. when I minded where I was. I was sorry to gang. Dolly cam' to the door wi' me. She put oot the gas by mistake. I believe I kissed her—the first time I ever done sich a thing. She said she would write.

It was pourin' wi' rain when I got oot, and I was drooked afore I won hame. I had decided to get in at ma window if I could reach it. I reached it by standin' on an auld tattie barrel turned upsy-doon; but jist when I had shifted the catch wi' ma knife, the bottom broke and I fell into the barrel and rolled doon the street. I was a sight when I got oot, and feelin' gay sore forbye. I needna describe a' I suffered, but I got in at the window at last.

Ma aunt cried to me from her bed, sayin':

"Why did ye no' try the door, John? I left it open."

XIII

The Profiteer

IT'S no' often P. Clark loses his hair, but he fairly let it fly the other mornin'. Miss Moubray's young man was hame on short leave, and though she hadna been at her work a fortnight after her mumps, &c., P. Clark said she could tak' a day off for canoodlin' purposes—I'm pretty sure that's what he meant, onyway. I would ha'e to break ma neck afore he would offer *me* a day off! That's the worst of being undispensable.

Weel, we hadna long opened the shop, when P. Clark remembered a case in the cellar that had to be unpacked—some new patent dissipated egg conglabbera-

tion that the public was fallin' over their feet to buy. It was in packets, wi' a pictur' o' a singin' hen on the ootside. I wanted to see what the stuff was like, but P. Clark refused to let me open it in his shop. He gi'ed me a packet for ma aunt to try, but she's a suspicious body, and she's keepin' it till she has a visiter. She's no' like the general public, which'll buy onything if it's in a fancy enough packet.

But I disgress, as the man said in the dry book I was tryin' to read the other Sabbath.

P Clark was hammerin' awa' doon below, and I was gettin' a few goods ready for the early delivery, when Mrs. Turpie cam' into the shop. I've often said to P. Clark that Mrs. Turpie's custom wasna worth the trouble it cost us, but he wouldna listen to me. "We canna choose oor customers, John," says he;

"A' we can dae is to treat everybody wi' curtsey and tack." Then he asks me if I kent what tack was. Of course I did. Tack is mearly a genteel name for coddin'.

As soon as I got behind the coonter, I seen that Mrs. Turpie was gaun to gi'e trouble, for her wee nose was extra red, and she kep' movin' her lips withoot openin' her mooth.

"Mornin'," says I, polite-like. "Something ye want sent, Mrs. Turpie?"

She didna speak, but laid doon an a/c and some silver, wi' a smack, on the counter.

"Thank ye," says I, and got forward the pen and ink. Then I took a squint at the a/c—8/10. Then I coonted the cash—8 bob—and put it back on the coonter, spread oot so as she could see it. Our motto is; Nae discoont excep' on large a/cs, when we canna help it.

I waited, wi' ma gaze modestly in-

verted, as ma aunt's penny novels would say, but excep' for a sort o' wee wheeze wi' her nose she made never a sound.

So at last I looked at her. She looked back at me, and her face seemed to grow bigger and bigger, and her nose wee-er and wee-er, till it was like a cherry on a cake o' long, long ago.

After a while she says short-like, says she:

"Can ye no' reciept an accoont?"

"I can," says I, wi' great respec', "when it's paid, mistress."

"Ye've as much money there as ever ye'll get," she says.

"I'm sorry," says I, "but it's no quite enough." Wi' a pleasant smile, I adds: "Surely, Mrs. Turpie, another tenpence'll no' burst ye."

Dear, dear! Tack is waisted on some folk! She flew into a passion.

"I'm for none o' your impiddence,"

she says. "Receipt that accoont in full, this instant!"

I sadly shook ma heid, and put the pen back in the ink-pot.

"What?—ye refuse?" she yells. "I tell ye I'm entitled to the tenpence off! I've been charged ower much for the groceries, and I'm no' gaun to stand it."

I kep' ma temper. "Mr. Clark," says I, "sells everything at the fairest prices. He wouldna seek to cheat a dotty German."

"Na; but he would tak' advantage o' his ain folk," she says. "He's a profiteer, that's what he is!"

"Here, stop it!" says I. I was that angry I could ha'e took and pushed the cherry into the cake. "Ye've nae business to say a thing like that behind his back."

"Fetch him, and I'll say it to his front."

"He'll ha'e ye up for damnages."

"Fetch him!"

"He's busy. Come on, mistress," says I, thinkin' to sooth her, "ye ken fine Mr. Clark's as honest a man as ye'll fine in Kirkside, and a heap honester than some we could name. Suppose ye settle the accoont noo, and ha'e a nice wee frien'ly crack wi' him the next time ye're in—eh?"

I thought I had won, but alas! she had jist been gettin' her breath. And noo she burst oot into a long story aboot hoo she had been diddled wi' this, that & the other thing. And afore she run dry, P. Clark, to ma unspeechable horror, arrived on the seen.

"What's ado, John?" says he, stern-like.

Afore I could answer, she cries: "Oh, there he is, the profiteer hissel'!" And she pinted her finger at him.

"What's that ye're sayin', Mrs. Turpie?" he asks, no' catchin' her meanin'.

"Profiteer, profiteer!" And she near danced wi' her angry passion.

P. Clark turned the colour o' Dunlop cheese, and I seen his hand shake. But he didna lift his voice above the usual.

"John, what started this?" he asks me.

I showed him the a/c and the cash. After a wee while he gi'ed a nod.

"Receipt it," says he.

I jist looked at him.

"D'ye hear me?" he says. "Receipt the accoont."

Of course I had to obey. "Am I to put '*with* thanks'?" I calmly inquired, though I was bilin' inside.

He didna answer, so I wrote "*without* thanks," and scored it under. I folded the paper and shoved it across the coonter.

"And noo," says P. Clark to her, "I'll be pleased if ye never enter ma shop again."

She gaed to the door afore she answered him. "If your shop was the only place open," says she, savage-like, "I wouldna enter it, no' if I was chased by the Germans."

"Hoots!" says I, "nae German would chase you, once he seen your face!"

She was that surprised she couldna speak, and jist then Postie cam' in wi' some letters, so she thought it best to hook it. As soon as Postie had went, I says to P. Clark, says I:

"That dished her!—eh?"

But he wasna a bit gratified; in fac' he was lookin' as savage as ever I see him. Suddently he started to stamp up and doon behind the coonter, shakin' his fist at naething and makin' comic faces—though of course, they wasna intended to be that. And jist as suddently he stopped, and cried in a loud gronin' voice:

"Boy! did ye hear what she called me?"

"I'm no' deaf," says I.

"She called me Profiteer!—Profiteer!" he says, tremlin'.

"It would ha'e been like her neck to ha'e called ye the Profit Jonah," I says for to cheer him up.

He pd. nae attention. "Profiteer!" he says again; "that's what she called me!"

"So it is," says I; "and ye presented her wi' 10d. for daein' it. Oh, ye'll get plenty to call ye names at that price, Mr. Clark."

It was jist as if I had poked ma finger into his wastecoat. He gi'ed a queer start, and then stared at me for ever so long. Then, at last, he says, in a voice that sounded as if he had been tryin' to swallow a pun' o' dry oatmeal, says he:

"What might ye be meanin' by that, ma lad?"

"I'll tell ye what I think, if you'll first tell me what made ye drop the 10d.,

Mr. Clark," I says, speakin' quite respectful-like, but lookin' him straight in the eye.

After a wee while he lets out a grone. "I hope I'm an honest man," says he, "but I never could face publicosity. I dropped the 10d., John, because I was feared her voice would gather a crowd to the shop door. If she had been a man——"

"Ay," says I, "I admit ye was handycaped by her sect, as ye've been afore in mair or less similar cases. Noo, dae ye want to hear what I think?"

"Go on," says he a bit short-like.

"I think," says I, "that it's her that's the profiteer."

"What?" says he.

"Wait and see, Mr. Clark," says I.

Weel, I was right, as it turned oot, though I was mearly guessin' then.

We both made inquiries secret-like,

and afore long we discovered that Mrs. Turpie had run up small a/cs wi' ½ the shops in Kirkside, and then done the shopkeepers the same as she done P. Clark. Ye can call them a' cowards, if ye like, genteel reader, but I've got an aunt, and I ken that a yellin' woman is a fearful thing. So, on the hole, I simpathize wi' P. Clark and his fellow sufferers.

And if ye ask for proof o' the truth o' ma tale, I beg to inform ye that on the second Sabbath after the event, Mrs. Turpie, wee red nose and all, waddled into the Kirk, as prood as ye like, wi' a split new hat, on which was stuck a bunch o' grapes, severeal plooms, and a lot o' fig leaves. P. S.—The fruits wasna genuine.

XIV

Jessie Once More

TUESDAY, last week, I slep' in owin' to ma aunt thinkin' she had wakened me 3 times, when she had only done it twice. I'm gettin' fed up wi' her carelessness. P. Clark was doon on me like a cart o' bricks, and if I hadna kent the man didna mean it, I would ha'e gi'ed him warnin' on the spot, for there's fifty jobs I could get the noo as easy as winkin'. Still, I like P. Clark weel enough to overlook a guid deal, and, as Miss Moubray was in the shop, I respected his feelin's, and didna even answer him back. But I wasna what ye would call in the best o' fettle when I set oot on the mornin' roun' for orders, ½ an hour late.

JESSIE ONCE MORE

I was gaun up Bogle's Brae when I met Peter Knox comin' doon. Noo, for the last two-three weeks Peter Knox has been aboot as cheery-like as a goat wi' a gum-bile. In fac', he was talkin' the last time I could be fashed listenin' to him, o' chuckin' up everything and becomin' a sailor, though he kens naething about naval affairs excep' what he's picked up in Goldie's fish-shop, which is 25 mile frae the nearest coast. But when I met him that mornin' he had a smile on his face like a crack in a current bun.

"What's wrang wi' ye?" says I.

"Wrang wi' me!" he says in surprise. "Naething!"

"Ye look as if ye was gaun off your onion," I tells him.

"It's rapture!" says he. "I've seen her!"

"Seen wha?" I asks.

"Jessie," says he, wi' as silly a look as ever I seen on a human mug.

"Oh," says I, "I thought ye didna call on the folk she's wi'!"

"Ah, but she's in a new place—since last night," says he.

"That's her 14th situation since the New Year," says I.

"What if it is?" he cries. "It shows what a favourite she is!"

"Well," says I, "ye should get photographed afore your face slips again. So long!"

"Aw, bide a minute," says he. "What dae ye think? She's asked me to ma supper the night!" And he burst oot laughin' like a hen ower its egg.

I admit I was astonished at the news. "Wha's her new mistress?" I says, as if I wasna.

"Mrs. Park. She's awa' to Glasgow this mornin', and she and Park'll no' be

hame till the last train. They're jist new married—fine soft job for Jessie! But what dae ye think of her askin' me to ma supper, Johnny?" he says, as cocky as ye like.

"Depends on what ye're gaun to get for yer supper," says I.

"I can tell ye that!" says he. "Steak & kidney pie, and hot buttered toast, and cheese, and stewed figs, and——"

"Stop it! I dinna want to be disgusted," says I. "This is war-time. Ye might think shame o' yersel', Peter Knox!"

"But it's no' jist the feed I'm gaun for," he says, grinnin' and blushin'.

"Haw," says I, wi' a kind smile, "I suppose ye think she's mashed on ye, Peter. Maybe she's losin' her reason wi' so many changes. Weel, I maun get a move on. So long, and Heaven help ye!"

I left him crimsen wi' confusion—that's oot o' a book—and went on ma weary way. But I couldna help wonderin' what Jessie was after, for she was still walkin' oot wi' the railway porter—him wi' the game leg and stammer, puir chap—and Peter's but the two year aulder nor masel,' which is no' a marrigible age. However, as Park's hoose was one o' my calls, I fancied I would maybe learn something frae Jessie hersel'.

Later on, I found her sittin' in the garden eatin' grapes and playin' wi' the cat, for it was a fine, warm mornin'.

"Hullo, Jessie," says I. "Ye've made another change!"

"And for the better, once more, Johnny," says she.

"Ye wasna long wi' Mrs. Davy," says I.

"I was there a fortnight. She wasna ½ bad, but I couldna stick the boss. He

was that pernicketty," she says. "Worked hissel' into a shockin' passion because he got a hairpin in his soup."

"So it was really the sack for ye this time," says I.

"Not at all! I proved the hairpin was one o' hers—and so it was, for I got it off her dressin' table—and resigned afore she could open her mooth." And Jessie laughed like to kill herself. When she got better she asked me if I could shift a bottle o' lemonade. "I was jist thinkin' o' ha'ein' one masel'," she says.

I said I had nae objections to jinin' her. "Ye seem to be in clover here, Jessie," I remarks.

"That's the word for it," says she. "Ye see, the young couple is that happy, they want everybody else to be ditto. I shouldna wonder if I stop here a couple o' month."

While we was drinkin' the lemonade I

mentions, careless-like, ma meetin' wi' Peter Knox.

"Maybe he told ye," she says, "o' the little hoose-warmin' I'm ha'ein' the night. I hope ye'll come, Johnny."

I could scarsely beleive ma ear. "To ma supper?" I says at last.

"8 p.m., promp'," says she. "The mistress'll no' be back till 11."

Well, I couldna rudely refuse. But a' the same, as I gaed doon the road, I couldna help wonderin'; and if it had been the 1st o' Ap. instead o' the 23rd o' Aug. I would ha'e had the gravest doubts, as the newspapers says. "However," says I to masel', "I'm asked to ma supper, and I'll see that I get it."

In the afternoon I met Peter. He didna seem extra pleased to hear o' ma invite, but he promised to meet me in guid time to be there at 8.

And so he did, wi' three cuts on his face,

and mair pomade nor hair on his heid. I had simply had a wash and put on a clean collar and ma Sabbath tie. I had took as little tea as possible, but Peter had took none, and was like to drop for want o' meat.

We arrived promp' to the minute. And there was Jessie, a terrible swell in a pink dress and pink stockin's. Aw, I've seen uglier nor her. She tell't us to sit doon and mak' oorsel's at hame, but Peter was that bashful he couldna dae naething but twist his legs and grin. The table was set for three, and when Jessie opened the oven to let us see the pie, and the hot toast, and the figs, the perfume o' that kitchen would ha'e been heavenly, if it hadna been for Peter's pomade.

"We'll begin in five minutes," says Jessie, lookin' at the clock. And jist as she spoke the bell rang.

"Mercy! and the postman's past!" she cried. "Dinna mak' a sound." She ran oot o' the kitchen, and I guessed she was keekin' at the glass front-door. She cam' back lookin' as if she had seen a gosht. "Oh, criffens!" she whispers. "They've come hame wi' the earlier train! I'm done for! Scoot, lads!"

The bell rang again, and we scooted. I was gey angry, and Peter wasna far off the greetin'.

Afore long I stopped runnin'.

"See here, Peter," says I, "I hope she's no' got into trouble. I'm gaun back to see. Come on!"

We gaed back, and crep' like mice to the kitchen window. We could jist manage to see through the screen.

Oh, what an unseemly sight to behold! Jessie, smilin' like to hurt hersel', was puttin' the pie on the table, noo set for

twa, in front o' the railway porter, in a' his Sabbath duds.

"Oh dear, oh dear!" says Peter, and I was near gronin' masel', for it was a dirty crule thing she had did to him and me, especially him.

But suddenly I got a notion.

"Peter," says I, "slip roun' to the front door, and ring the bell; then bunk back to the lane. Quick, or I'll knock the face off ye!"

He went, and I waited. And at last the bell rang.

Ye should ha'e seen the faces o' Jessie and the porter! Gilt was wrote upon them! I had jist time to jink behind the meat-safe when he cam' oot, fleein' for his life by the back-gate.

It was noo or never! I ran into the kitchen, got the pie in a towle, nabbed some spoons, and hooked it, jist as Jessie banged the front-door.

There's a wee wood yonder, nice and handy, and Peter and me was hid in it by the time Jessie cam' to the back-gate wi' a lamp. Whether she was lookin' for the porter or the pie, I canna tell ye.

At first Peter wouldna eat, gronin' at the trick Jessie had tried to play, but in the end he shifted the biggest ½, and called me a holy jenius.

Later on, we left the dish and spoons at the back door.

Honesty is the best policy. When ye're asked to yer supper, see that ye get it.

XV

He Discourses on Marriage

THERE'S something in the wind at hame. For the last month or twa McGuffie, the Carrier, has took to droppin' in at night and keepin' ma aunt comp'ny; and ma aunt has stopped flytin' me for gaun oot after I've had ma tea. It used to be: "Can ye no' sit still and read something for to improve yer mind, ye stupid thing?" But noo it's: "I suppose ye maun ha'e yer amusement, laddie; jist dinna be ower late"—or something like that. And the other night, when I cam' hame early, because it was wet, I found McGuffie turnin' the mangle for her. Weel, when a man does that for a woman, free, graetis, there's something up.

I daresay I wouldna objec' to McGuffie for an uncle-in-law; he was aye guid to me when I was a wean, and many's the ride I got on his cart—that was afore he becam' a swell wi' his motor-lorry. But I canna think what he sees in ma aunt. She's no' exactly ugly, but she's far frae beauteous. However, when a man gets up in years, like McGuffie, I suppose one face is as nice as another, and, after a' it's no' the face that cooks his meat and keeps his hoose for him.

It would be a guid enough thing for ma aunt, if he was to accep' her. He has been wed already, but his wife defunked severeal years ago, and, they say, he's been savin' cash ever since. He's got a bonny wee cottage wi' a fine garden—things for eatin', I mean; and he keeps pigs, so ma aunt would ha'e company when he was awa' on the road. I should say he wouldna expec' her to

keep on the landry; that would look ower like as if he was marryin' her for to get his sarks biled for naething. I dinna think he's that sort.

Besides, ma aunt's no' as stupid as she looks. She wouldna encourage him if she thought he was seekin' to better hissel' at her expenses. He's no' the first, mind ye, that has tried to get her. Ye may think that astonishin', but it's a fac'. There was an auld plumber chap that once tried to hang up his hat. He was better at smokin' pipes nor mendin' them, and he touched beer oftener nor water; but he was a great talker, and at first ma aunt seemed to fancy him. But she soon seen that what he wanted was to retire frae his trade and tak' a nice easy-osie job in the landry, where there was naething for him to dae excep' coont the cash, when there was ony. And afore long ma aunt turned him off like an

escape o' gas. Oh, she's no' so green aboot auld men. It's the young folk she doesna understand.

Marriage is a queer thing. Near everybody seems daft for to get it, but they're no' a' so pleased-like after they've got it. And a weddin's a queer thing, too. I've been but the once at a weddin'. Ma aunt took me because she couldna leave me in the hoose, ma age then bein' tender. I dinna mind much aboot it excep' that the 1st part was like a funeral, and the 2nd part was maybe meant to be funny. But it was nae fun for me, no' even the supper. I suppose I misbehove masel' at the table for ma aunt made me get doon ablow it, and I sat there greetin' to masel' till a kind man started to pass me pastries and sangwidges and sausiges, and fruits and cakes and sweeties, and he kep' on passin' till I was as sick as a pussy cat. I hope ma aunt's weddin',

if it comes off, will be cheerier nor that.

As far as I can mak' oot, girls is keener nor men on gettin' married. I said that to Miss Moubray, the other day, and she was terrible offended.

"I didna mean to insult ye," says I, offerin' her a date frae a box that had got damaged. "I was speakin' o' girls on the hole. Of course *you* never needed to chase a man." That was a compliment, but it was threw away. So I thought it best to eat the date masel'.

"Chase a man, indeed!" she says hottily. "No true girl would ever dream of doing such a thing."

"I canna tell ye whether they dream aboot it or no'," says I, "but there's plenty o' chasers in Kirkside."

She said she didna believe it.

"There's a porter at the station," I tells her, "and I could name a dozen girls

that's after him. And he's only after one o' them."

"He must be an attractive young man!" she says, wi' a snuff. "And do they chase him up and down the platform?"

"My! but ye're green!" says I, afore I could stop it. "That's no what I meant by chasin'."

"And what did you mean?" she asks.

I had to think for a second. Then says I: "Nae doobt, Miss Moubray, ye've had chaps runnin' after ye in yer time—afore ye got engaged."

She gi'ed her heid a bit toss, and tried no' to smile.

"Well, I see ye cannot deny it," I says. "But ye're no' gaun to tell me that the chaps kep' runnin' wi' their feet a' the time—are ye?"

"Of course not," she says, lookin' a little mair agreeable at me. "*Running*

after is what is called a figure of speech, Johnny."

"Right ye are!" says I. "And so is *chasin'!* Somebody gets catched either way."

"You are too young to be talking of such things," she says, on her high horse again. "As for the porter and the twelve girls, even if I could believe it, it proves 0 to me."

"It proves a lot to me," says I.

"What does it prove?" she asks.

"It proves that girls is twelve times as keen on gettin' married as men is," I replies.

At that she burst oot laughin', and then a customer cam' in, so oor conversation was at an end.

The same afternoon, I met Jessie on the road, oot for her ½-holiday. Her and me had made it up the mornin' after the supper affair; she admitted she had

played a dirty trick, and I admitted that she was fit to mak' pies for the royal family. But Peter Knox hasna got ower it yet. He keeps wishin' he hadna et his share o' the pie, because Jessie'll think he cared mair for his inside nor for her, and noo he canna reprooch her for her crulety, &c. Aw, ye never seen sich a pessimism as Peter

I asked Jessie where she was boun' for.

"The station," says she, withoot a blush.

"Oh, can ye no' let the man be?" says I.

"What man?" says she.

"Ye ken fine what man!" I replies.

"Oh," she says laughin', "ye mean the porter? That's a' by, Johnny."

"What? Ha'e ye gi'ed him the push?" I asks.

"Jist that," says she. "He never cam' back to see if the mistress had killed

me that night. Na, na; he'll get the frozen face frae me when I get into the train. I dinna ask for heros and gladiators at this time o' day, but I expec' a man to be worthy o' his troosers."

"Splendid!" says I. "But a' the same, Jessie," I says respectful-like, "I suppose ye're keen on gettin' married?"

"Is this a proposal?" says she, turnin' up her eyes and claspin' her hands. She had on pure white gloves, mind ye!

"Ach, get oot!" says I. "It's jist a question——"

"Without the pop!" she says smilin'. "Weel, I'll gi'e ye a straight answer. I *am* keen on gettin' married—as keen as mustard——"

"I thought ye was!" says I.

"But I ha'ena yet seen the man I would marry—no' if it was to save ma neck!"

"Well, I'm dashed!" says I. "Ha'e ye ever had ony proposals?"

"Heaps," says she. "I've been engaged three times, but I aye got fed up wi' the chap."

"Upon ma sam," says I, "I dinna understand girls."

"Ye'll be a gey auld man afore ye dae that," she says. "So long, Johnny. I maun scoot for the train."

She scooted, and I canna tell ye yet whether I beleive her or no'!

Aweel, I hope ma aunt's no' so ill to please. The mair I think on it, the mair I like the notion o' that bonny wee cottage o' McGuffie's, wi' its vegitibles and fruits, no' forgettin' the pigs.

XVI

A Good Cause

FOR a long while I had been wishin' I could dae something for the wounded sojers—something off ma ain bat, I mean; but when ye've an aunt that reg'larly pinches yer wages, a' but a bob, the sojers arena likely to get a handsome treat in a hurry; and at the beginnin' o' last month I was near to chuckin' the notion in dispair. But ye never ken yer luck.

On the Sunday mornin' ma aunt forgot to wind as usual the grandfayther's clock—I doobt there's really something up betwixt her and McGuffie, the Carrier—and the auld thing stopped in the middle o' the night. Next mornin' ma

aunt got up in a fright, yellin' that we had slep' in; and I was at ma breakfast afore I was ½ awake. Worse nor that, I was at the shop 10 minutes ower early.

However, P. Clark was pleased when he arrived on the seen, and said I was improvin'. He opened the door and gaed into the back-shop to get his apron, while I took doon the shutters. When I seen him again he had a face as long's a fiddle.

"John," says he, "a tradegy has happened. The cat's been and got another famly."

We keep a cat in the shop to keep doon the mice. It whiles droons them in the treacle, I think.

"What way a tradegy, sir?" says I.

"Oh," says he, wi' a grone, "I'm sure I've drooned three hundred kittens in ma time, and I'm no' used to it yet. Did ever ye droon a kitten, John?"

"Ma aunt never kep' a cat," says I.

"There's six back there," he says, wipin' his brow. "Dammit!" says he—I never heard him say it straight oot afore—"I canna look the mither in the face. Dae ye think ye could manage the job?"

"Easy," says I.

"Ye'll no' let them suffer?" says he.

"Leave it to me," says I. "D'ye want it done noo?"

"Ay," says he, "the sooner the better."

I gaed into the back shop. I thought it would ha'e been easy, but it wasna. In fac', I jist couldna dae it. I was gey ashamed o' masel'. I sat and looked at the wee things, and wondered what I would say to P. Clark. I canna tell ye what made me think o' the sojers then.

P. Clark cam' ben afore I was ready.

"So ye canna dae it, John," says he, wi' great kindness. "I shouldna ha'e

asked ye. Awa' forward to the shop, laddie. I maun jist dae it masel'."

"Will ye let me keep them, sir," says I, "and ask nae questions in the meantime?"

"What!" says he. "Keep six kittens! Wha's to feed them when the time comes?"

"I'll see to that," says I. "Let me keep them, Mr. Clark."

"Here?" says he.

"Ay," says I. "In the cellar, if ye like."

Aweel, the upshot was that he said I could keep them, but he left me waggin' his heid.

The keepin' o' them 6 kittens was nae joke; it burst me finnancially; but we needna gang into that.

It took me a day or 2 to mak' ma plans, and then I seen I would need some help. I wanted somebody that could tell a

falsehood wi' a straight face. So I gaed to Jessie.

"Jessie," says I, "dae ye want to dae some wounded sojers a guid turn?"

"Gi'e me the chance," says she.

"Can I trust ye?" I asks.

"Wi' onything but confectionary," she replies.

So I tell't her ma plan.

When I had finished, she flung her arms roun' ma neck and kissed me.

"Aw, cheese it!" says I, grately astonished, though no' exactly disgusted.

"I couldna help it," says she. "Ye're a fair treat, Johnny, and I'll help ye for a' I'm worth. It'll be fine fun, too." And she laughed. "This is ma night out, and I'll commence sowin' the guid seed."

She kep' her word.

In three days dozens o' the servant girls in Kirkside was complainin' to their mis-

tresses aboot a moose in the pantry, and folk was beginnin' to talk o' the terrible plague o' mice which a famous rat-catcher had foretelled was comin' wi' the winter.

Then it was time for me to get busy. In makin' ma mornin' calls I mentioned the subjec' o' mice at every door. If I got any encouragement, I mentioned the subjec' o' cats. If I got a little mair encouragement, I asked for to see the mistress, if she wasna present.

I was gey bashful at first, but afore long I had ma speech pretty pat. It was this:

"Fine (or disagreeable) mornin', ma'am. Ye'll ha'e heard o' the mice plague that's comin'. Traps is maybe a sort o' cure, but cats is prevention. I can supply a superior kitten, to be delivered at yer door in three weeks, price twa shillin's and six-pence, net—and

every penny'll gang to a treat for the wounded sojers."

Weel, it seemed ower guid to be true, but by the second mornin' I had booked orders for a' ma 6 kittens!

I wasna long in lettin' Jessie ken. She seemed pleased, but she didna try to kiss me again. I was a little surprised at that. Girls is rum.

"Are ye no' satisfied?" I asks her.

"Are you?" says she.

"Fifteen bob is no' bad," I says.

"For a start," says she. "Bless yer heart, Johnny, why d'ye no' commandeer a' the kittens born in Kirkside? If ye dinna, other people will, and I wouldna garrantee that the sojers'll get the benefit. If ye need a bit cash, ye'll find it here."

"By jings," says I, "ye're a bright one, Jessie! I'll ha'e a shot at it."

But I soon seen it wasna gaun to be

easy. Cash would be needed, but I couldna think to tak' Jessie's. And, of course, there was nae time to be lost. I was desprate.

And so I done the last thing I ever thought I would ha'e done. I asked ma aunt for a pound.

"It's for charity," I says, and I daresay I wasna exactly noble to look at. I couldna ha'e made a speech to *her*—no' to save ma neck.

But she wasna angry, and she didna laugh.

"A pound's a heap o' money, John," she says. "Could ye no' manage to tell me a wee bit mair?"

Afore I kent what I was daein', I had tell't her everything.

And then she laughed, but it wasna an ill laugh; and then she nodded; and then she says, says she:

"If ye need the money, ye'll get it.

Ye've better brains nor ever I thought ye had, Johnny. But I think ye should stick to the sellin' and leave the commandeerin' to me. It seems mair in ma line, and work's slack the noo."

"Ye would dae that?" says I, fair dumfoondered.

"I will!" says she.

"Ye're a white woman!" says I, and I meant it.

Oh! it was a great success! Ma aunt got that many kittens, I had to get Peter Knox and another chap to help to sell them. Altogether we planted nine-and-forty War Pussies. I daresay some o' the customers bought them for the sojers' sake, and didna care a button for the mice. And here and there I managed to get 5 bob instead o' mearly 2/6, and 1 auld gentleman, after laughin' like to end hissel', coughed up a pound, and said I was an impiddent young rascal.

The grand totle was £7. 12. 6., and P. Clark made it up to £8—(Miss Moubray had bought a kitten)—and the treat is to tak' place at the Hospital next week.

But I'm sort o' vexed—I don't think—for the folk that laid in traps. Forgie, the ironmonger, was sold oot 3 times and then couldna get mair traps to supply the demand. Then, last night, Jessie—I wish I had that girl's neck!—gaed to Forgie in secret and tell't him the truth aboot the plague o' mice, and *he* laughed like to end hissel', and promised to add a' the money he had got for traps to oor £8.

Oh, dear, I'm beginnin' to think I was born lucky after a'!

XVII

His Fortune

ON Monday mornin' I slep' in, and ma aunt says: "Never heed, Johnny, I daresay Mr. Clark'll excuse ye, for ye've been a guid servant to him." And she gi'ed me an extra nice breakfast.

"Either I'm gaun mad," I says to masel', "or she's turned ower a new leaf." When I was ready to gang to the shop, I says to her careless-like: "I've naething special on the night, so, if ye're busy, I could turn the mangle for ½ an hour or so."

"Oh, we'll see, we'll see," she says. "There's no' much work comin' in the noo."

"So I've noticed," says I. "Ye dinna seem to be anxious."

I thought she got red in the face, but I couldna wait to see whether she was cross or mearly warm wi' eatin'.

On the road to the shop, I seen McGuffie startin' his motor-lorry. He cries: "Fine mornin', John," but he didna look me in the face the way he aye used to dae.

P. Clark had a word for me for bein' late, but I took it lyin' doon.

When I called for orders at Jessie's back-door, the first thing she says to me was:

"Johnny, is there onything daein' betwixt yer aunt and McGuffie, the Carrier? I was at the Kirk last night, and somebody said McGuffie was never off yer aunt's doorstep. It would be a grand match for her—eh?"

"It wouldna be a bad one for him," says I quicker nor I meant. Then seein' her starin' at me, I says: "Ma aunt's no' as rotten as I thought she was."

"She treated ye pretty decent ower the War Pussies business," says Jessie.

"And other things," says I. "Weel, since ye're askin', I think there is something on betwixt them, but I'll thank ye no' to yatter aboot it in the meantime. I'll let ye ken if onything happens. And noo if ye please, I'll tak' doon the order."

"Right ye are, Johnny," she says. "I like to hear ye stick up for yer aunt, and I hope it comes off, for your sake."

Gaun doon the road, I met Peter Knox.

"What's this aboot yer aunt?" says he.

"What aboot her?" says I.

"Her and McGuffie, the Carrier," he says. "Everybody's speakin' aboot it."

"I'm no'," says I, and left him.

When I got hame that night, I found she had got a tin o' salmon for ma tea—and that costs something nooadays.

"Ye're no' devourin' yer usual the night," I says to her, after a while, jist for to see what sort o' temper she was in.

She answered me as soft as butter. "Maybe I'm no', John."

That was a' the conversation till she had started to wash up. Then she says, withoot lookin' at me, says she:

"Ye might run doon to Mr. McGuffie, the Carrier. He wants to speak to ye."

I shoved ma hanky in ma mooth, and scooted.

McGuffie took me into his parlour, and sat strokin' his whiskers for ever so long. At last he says:

John, yer aunt is a vera retirin' and modest woman." I expected him to wink, but he didna. "John," says he, "she has asked me to inform ye o' 2 things. First: Her and me ha'e decided to get married. I hope ye've nae objections."

"Ye're welcome," says I, no' kennin' what else to say.

"Thank ye," says he. "The second thing concerns ye mair personally. As ye are doobtless aware, your parents left ye a little money, the interest on which has been paid to yer aunt since she took charge o' ye, fifteen or sixteen year back. But your aunt has never spent a penny o' that interest, which is £25. Though she was whiles ill able to afford it, and though she whiles found her work hard to carry on, she has aye put the money in the bank for yoursel'—it's noo in the War Loan—over £500, she tells me. And so when ye come o' age, ye'll find yoursel' worth something like fifteen hundred pound, all told. I think that's a' I've got to tell ye. She said she hadna the face to tell ye hersel'." And he started strokin' his whiskers again

I hadna a word to say for masel', and after a while he says:

"Come up the stair, John, and see the room ye're to sleep in when ye come to bide here."

When I see the room, I couldna but think he was ha'ein' a rise oot o' me. I never seen a room like it. Everything was that neat and cosy and braw. It was fit for a king.

"A' we'll ask o' ye, John," says he, "is that ye'll deal fair wi' us, and be upright and happy."

Weel, I canna mind what I said to him, excep' that I called him a white man, which didna seem to annoy him grately.

Then we gaed up to ma aunt's, and her and me shook hands, and then I said I thought I would tak' a walk to masel'.

"Dinna be later nor ½ past 9," says ma aunt. "Ham and eggs then."

"Oh, help!" says I to masel'. "I'm

gaun to be killed wi' kindness, like the fatted calf."

There was jist the 2 people I wanted to tell aboot ma fortune. P. Clark was 1, but I kent he was awa' to see his sister in the country. The other was Jessie; and in a wee while I was chappin' at her back-door. I canna tell ye jist why I had to tell Jessie, after a' the tricks she had played on me, and her bein' sich a flighty thing. But she's no' a bad hearted girl, and I've seen uglier.

"Come ben, Johnny," she says. "The young couple's oot roamin' in the gloamin'. I was jist thinkin' o' presentin' a bit o' toasted cheese and apple tart to masel'. Ye'll get your share."

"Oh dinna speak to me o' food!" says I. "Ma aunt has forgot it's wartime."

"Come in quick and tell me!" she says.

The kitchen was near as tidy as ma aunt's, and Jessie was as neat as a new pin.

"I like ye in yer cap and apron," says I, sittin' doon at the fireside.

"I sort o' fancy masel' in them," says she. "But for ony favour, gi'e us the news."

So I tell't her aboot the engagement and aboot ma room in the cottage, and aboot ma fortune.

It fair took her breath awa'.

"Oh, it's you that's the lucky lad," she says after a while. "Hoo auld are ye, Johnny?"

"16," says I. "I wish I was 5 year aulder."

"In 5 years I'll be 4 and 20," she says, sort o' sad-like. "But I wouldna marry for gold."

"I'm no' askin' ye," says I. "A' the the same, Jessie . . ." I was gaun to say

something, but I seemed to forget what it was.

She hove a sigh and says:

"It's a pity we canna swop ages, Johnny."

"Aw," says I, "ye was an awful cheeky thing when ye was ma age—no' that ye're much better noo. Still, I daresay I wouldna mind if ye was 16 again, though I think ye're nicer lookin' noo."

"Ye really think that, Johnny? What's nicer-looker' aboot me?" she asks, sort o' squintin' at me.

"Ye're fatter," says I.

"Is that a'?" she says, disappinted-like.

"Och, I'm no' gaun to pay ye ony mair complements," I says. "It's time I was gettin' doon the road."

"I'll come to the gate wi' ye," she says. "I feel as if I was never gaun to see ye again."

"Ye'll see me the morn's mornin', as usual," says I.

"Are ye no' gaun to chuck the groceries?" she says, openin' the door.

"What would I dae that for?" says I.

"My! it's terrible dark," she remarks.

"Are ye feart?" I asks her.

"No' wi' you," she says, grippin' ma arm. "Oh, dear, dear! to think o' wee Johnny Pryde wi' a fortune o' his ain!"

"I ha'ena got it yet," I says. "As ye was sayin', it's a pity we canna swop ages."

Then we both seemed to dry up; we stood at the gate for ever so long like a pair o' dummies. I thought aboot ham and eggs and the time she kissed me.

"Jessie," says I, though I hadna meant to say it.

"What, Johnny?" she says, whisperin'.

"Oh, naething." Then I said I would need to hook it.

"I'm no' keepin' ye, am I," says she.

"Weel ye're no' exactly keepin' me," I says. "Still, I'd as soon be here as shiftin' ham and eggs."

"Complements is flyin' the night," she says, wi' a wee laugh. She took her hand frae ma arm. "Weel," says she, "I think ye'd better slope, Johnny. Yer aunt doesna get engaged every day."

"Jessie," says I, after a while.

"Ye've made that remark afore," says she.

"Weel, so long," I says, after another while.

"So long," says she.

I swithered, then I gaed doon the road. Kissin's no' in ma line, but I had thought it would ha'e been easier.

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